The Years Between

Martyr to the Queen

Feval and Lassez

MARTYR TO THE QUEEN

By

PAUL FEVAL *and* M. LASSEZ

In *Martyr to the Queen*, the story of the arrest of the Duchess of Cheuvreuse by D'Artagnan, as told at the close of *The Mysterious Cavalier*, runs swiftly to its fulfillment. There are few more graphic scenes, either in Dumas or in his present-day successors, than the one in which D'Artagnan's strategic nap foils the schemes of the crafty Mazarin.

Meanwhile, Cyrano de Bergerac, who is anxiously awaiting the return of the "Mysterious Cavalier," has a series of adventures of his own. The Queen is used as a pawn in a Court conspiracy to do away with Richelieu. The story then centers on "The Mysterious Cavalier," whose fate is tragically bound up with that of his beloved Queen. Even the valliant sword of Cyrano, who at one time holds twenty picked swordsmen at bay, can not cut through the meshes of the net that is mysteriously closing about him.

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B767 I

THIS BOOK BELONGS TO

THE YEARS BETWEEN

ADVENTURES *of* D'ARTAGNAN *and* CYRANO DE BERGERAC

I. THE MYSTERIOUS CAVALIER
II. MARTYR TO THE QUEEN

MARTYR TO THE QUEEN

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MARTYR TO THE QUEEN

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FEVAL & LASSEZ

MARTYR TO THE QUEEN

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MARTYR TO THE QUEEN

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CHAPTER I

AFTER THE LION, THE SERPENT

The Duchess of Chevreuse made her way towards Saint-Germain-en-Laye, under the friendly but viligant escort of M. d'Artagnan, lieutenant of the King's Musketeers. She was still dressed in the sombre cavalier's costume which she had worn as "Monsieur Bernard."

Since their departure from Berny, d'Artagnan's prisoner had not once opened her lips. He realized that she was absorbed by some secret meditation, and from various stealthy glances cast in his direction, that had not escaped his keen eye, he suspected the nature of her meditation.

Two slight incidents had aroused his suspicions. First, he had surprised her in the act of tearing up a bit of paper (Mazarin's note), the reading of which had awakened in her a lively emotion. Then he had seen her write mysteriously, with a piece of charcoal taken from the hearth, upon one of the pillars at the entrance of the pavilion. A few minutes afterwards, when he in turn approached the pillar, he found only a smudge. Some unknown hand had erased the words traced by the Duchess.

"The devil!" thought d'Artagnan. "I recognize Mazarin's hand in this. There can be no doubt about it. The cursed Italian managed to convey a message to the Duchess behind the Cardinal's back. Only he could have thought of such a cunning device for securing an answer. The arch villain is trying to trick every one, including the Cardinal himself and his fair enemy, Madame de Chevreuse.

"Well, he will make no dupe of me. If the buffoon tries any of his repertory on me, he'll get a return he is not expecting."

The two riders had come within sight of Saint-Germain, when to the Gascon's surprise, his prisoner, turning toward him suddenly, broke the silence.

"Tell me, Sir Body-gūard," she asked in her most gracious manner, "what do you intend to do with your prisoner?"

The question was disconcerting. The Musketeer made an evasive reply.

"You already know, Madame. We shall spend the night at *The Royal Oak*, always provided that the arrangement pleases you."

"Oh, yes, yes. It's perfect. But afterwards!"

"Afterwards? . . . I shall obtain a postchaise, this being the best means of making a quick trip without fatiguing you too much."

"When do we leave?"

"Tomorrow morning."

"For . . . ?"

"Boulogne."

"Direct?"

"Direct, and by long stages, if you are willing."

"If I am willing!" exclaimed the Duchess, amused. "To listen to you, one would think me embarked upon a journey to England for my own pleasure."

D'Artagnan answered calmly:

"Alas, Madame, this journey is neither your wish nor mine. We both obey the orders of the Cardinal. Let us put up with them with the best grace possible."

"Do I understand you to mean that we are both to make the best of a bad situation?"

This delicate question seemed so full of innuendo that the Musketeer thought it prudent not to commit himself. His companion pretended to construe his silence as one of approval.

"If this is true, Monsieur d'Artagnan, I trust that you will not increase my misfortune by excessive severity."

"Ah, now she's coming to the point," said the Gascon to himself. Aloud, he replied:

"Madame, I trust that you will not find me inconsiderate. As heretofore, I shall merely follow my orders strictly, conduct you as quickly as possible to Boulogne, and put you on the first boat for England."

"Yes, of course, I understand. However . . . if, without delaying us at all, it happened that . . . that I had a visitor . . ."

As a deep frown appeared on the Musketeer's brow the lady hastened to add:

"For instance, some one might need to speak to me . . ."

"Excuse me, Madame, but the Cardinal's orders are explicit. I answer for their execution with my head. As long as you are on French soil you are to hold communication with no one."

"One moment! If, instead of being a friend, this person were a stranger, an enemy even . . ."

"His Eminence made no exceptions."

"Oh, Lieutenant, you are going beyond the letter of your instructions. Would you still be inexorable if I told you that on this meeting depended the safety of a woman —of a great lady?"

D'Artagnan seemed deeply affected. His companion, taking advantage of this, continued with all the warmth of her voice and smile.

"You know this great lady well. At one time you loved her, and served her. Tell me, is your heart no longer loyal to her?"

The Musketeer, troubled, averted his eyes.

"I shall always do for her what my duty as a soldier permits."

"Come, then, you will not refuse this favor? Your conscience forbids you to allow enemies of the Cardinal to come near me. But if this person is a friend of his, one of his household . . ."

Suddenly d'Artagnan understood. His suspicions were

confirmed. Determined to bring the matter into the open, he said:

"Monsieur de Mazarin, for instance?"

"Yes, Monsieur de Mazarin!" she answered, leaning toward him with an appealing gesture. "What is your decision, M. d'Artagnan?"

The Musketeer had regained his habitual firmness. He moved further away from his temptress, and then said, almost gruffly:

"If it is Monsieur de Mazarin, I shall be doubly on my guard."

Madame de Chevreūse, disconcerted, bit her lips until they nearly bled.

"He's impossible!" she murmured in vexation.

Her escort was impervious to all her wiles. Her seductive graciousness had only aroused him to opposition. She must now try to remove this unfortunate impression.

"That was a mere supposition, of course," she began.

"I understand it as such, Madame."

"What could I have to do with Monsieur de Mazarin?"

"I am asking myself the same question!" said the Musketeer smiling, while to himself he said:

"I was right. There will be sūrprises tonight. I must be on my guard."

They had now entered Saint-Germain, and soon found themselves before the spacious entrance to *The Royal Oak.* D'Artagnan sprang from his horse. Gallantly he assisted his companion to dismount. The Duchess, with great dif-

ficulty, managed to appear calm and smiling. Yet her heart was prey to a cruel anxiety. She kept repeating to herself Mazarin's mysterious message: the casket found at Barbette's; sealed with a star; the magic word *"Remember,"* which pierced her heart like a cry for help, like a signal of impending disaster. She made a solemn resolution:

"I must see this man," she thought, *"at any cost."*

They entered the large public room of the inn. A number of persons were seated there, drinking and playing cards. As they came in, all turned to stare at them. The Duchess saw one of the players give a sidelong glance at her and then make a sign to his companions, who at once returned to their occupations.

This glance and this sign reassured the fair Duchess. Nothing was lost! Whether d'Artagnan consented or not, the meeting would take place. The clever Italian was first in the field and not wishing to take any chances, had filled the place with his followers.

"Ah ha!" exclaimed d'Artagnan, feigning surprise, "there's pleasant company at *The Royal Oak* tonight!"

The Duchess thought she saw a strange look come into the Gascon's sparkling eyes. His remark contained a touch of sarcasm. With pretended indifference, she inquired:

"Do these persons annoy you?"

"Annoy me? *Cadédis,* not in the slightest! I only fear that their noise may disturb you."

"Oh, that's quite all right. The Duchess of Chevreuse has nothing to fear from such men."

"The Duchess, no! But can Monsieur Bernard hope to be equally undisturbed?" The Musketeer smiled slightly, as he continued very deliberately:

"In any case, Madame, I think it best not to tarry in this room."

She made a gesture of resignation.

"As you please. You are the master."

D'Artagnan bowed, and then gave orders for his companion to be conducted to rooms on the first floor, where supper was to be served at once. When he gave these commands in a loud voice, it seemed to him that his host looked vexed, and that there was a stir in the ranks of the drinkers. He gave them a look of supreme indifference. They had already returned to their cups and games. All, except one, who looked at him steadily as if trying to recall who he was.

"Eh, *parbleu!*" he cried as he walked with extended hand toward the Musketeer. "I am surely not deceived! It is Monsieur d'Artagnan."

"Monsieur de Ruvigny," acknowledged the Gascon.

"What happy chance brings you to Saint-Germain?" asked the other, as he greeted him warmly.

"It is I, rather, who should ask you that question. Saint-Germain is a long way from the Rue Vivienne where you usually remain in attendance upon Monsieur de Mazarin."

Ruvigny blushed slightly. He had the dark face of an

Italian, and his sly eyes sparkled brightly beneath great shaggy brows.

"I've managed to get leave for the night. As you see, I hope to pass it in jovial company."

At a signal from Ruvigny, the drinkers arose. D'Artagnan's glance quickly travelled over the motley group, and he recognized with no surprise that they were Mazarin's hirelings.

"I trust that you will be kind enough to honor us with your company," remarked Ruvigny.

D'Artagnan pointed to his companion, who, an uninterested spectator of this scene, was awaiting him at the foot of the stairs.

"You must excuse me. I am not alone."

"Oh, that makes no difference. The gentleman is most welcome. It is sufficient introduction that he is a friend of yours, and . . ."

D'Artagnan in the calm, firm manner so characteristic of him, interrupted:

"I beg of you, do not insist. The gentleman wishes to sup alone."

"Not very courteous! What do you say, my friends?"

A muffled grumble was the answer. D'Artagnan now understood. He had fallen into a trap. The Italian had sent some of his bravoes to take his prisoner from him. D'Artagnan smiled as he thought:

"The fellow has a healthy respect for me. There are twelve of them!"

Ruvigny pretended to misunderstand the smile on the Musketeer's lips.

"Come," he cried in a loud, hearty voice, "do you mean to tell me that two such amiable gentlemen intend to retire with the chickens? Here is good wine, good food, good company, and," he added with a sly wink at the maids, "pretty girls."

D'Artagnan had now made up his mind, and he advanced straight toward Ruvigny, without displaying the slightest annoyance. He put his hand on the bravo's shoulder, and the simple movement made Mazarin's hireling quiver beneath his iron grip. Then clearly, in a low voice, d'Artagnan spoke:

"Listen, my good fellow. I cannot accept any invitation this evening. *Any invitation*, you understand me? You must dine without me. You must also explain the situation to your friends, and, if there is any difficulty, I shall not hold them responsible, but *you*."

Ruvigny made a sudden backward step, but the iron grip held him fast. The Musketeer, continuing, hissed out these words:

"You alone, Monsieur de Ruvigny. You understand?"

He then released the man, pale and trembling. Yes, he had understood. If a single sword left its scabbard, d'Artagnan would run him through. He shivered. If there was a fight, even with odds of twelve to one, he would be certain to meet death at the hands of the Musketeer, no matter what else happened.

"*Corbac*, Monsieur d'Artagnan," he said as he rubbed his smarting shoulder, "you have splendid arguments which no man of honor could oppose."

The Musketeer was still smiling pleasantly.

"My apologies, gentlemen," he said, as he saluted the company with a noble flourish. "I have just confided to my friend Ruvigny my reason for refusing. He can assure you that there is nothing offensive in my action."

He then followed the Duchess up the stairway that led to their rooms. The drinkers in consternation watched him depart. They then surrounded their still trembling leader, and bombarded him with questions:

"Why let him go?"

"What did he whisper to you?"

"You're as white as a sheet!"

"Silence!" called Ruvigny, who, now that the danger was over, had regained his usual assurance. "I have good reasons."

This answer was received with questioning mutters. The leader frowned savagely. Did they dare to question his word? He must think up some explanation with which to restore his reputation. He finally spoke to them as if confiding a secret:

"The poor fellow begged me to spare him. He dines tonight with a great lady—a very great lady. I couldn't refuse the poor fellow's request."

"We shall see what Monsieur Mazarin thinks about that," remarked one of the men.

Ruvigny hesitated a moment, but replied calmly:

"Pah! There will be no difficulty in finding other means. So while we wait, let us drink!"

This very logical suggestion put an end to the discussion, and they sat down again at the tables.

In a room on the first floor, directly above the heads of Mazarin's henchmen, d'Artagnan and the Duchess were seated at opposite sides of a table. Supper was served.

The Musketeer had made sure that everything was properly arranged. He had made a close examination of the place where the prisoner and he were to spend the night. It was a little suite of two rooms. One of them was the Duchess' bedroom, which could only be entered through the room in which they were now dining. D'Artagnan planned to spend the night in a chair placed in front of the door connecting the two rooms. The windows looked out on a garden which lay a safe distance below, but the Musketeer, leaving nothing to chance, had carefully bolted them. Thanks to these arrangements, no one would be able to communicate with the Duchess except by passing through the outer room, which opened upon the landing. It was d'Artagnan's plan when supper was finished to lock and bolt the massive outer door, thus cutting off all entrance.

The Musketeer could now devote himself to his supper in a peaceful frame of mind. If, as now seemed evident, Monsieur de Mazarin planned a nocturnal visit he would

have only his trouble for his pains. D'Artagnan fully appreciated his adversary's diabolical cleverness. How, for instance, had this arch trickster managed to put the idea of a secret interview into the mind of the fair Duchess? The Musketeer's curiosity was doubly aroused because the Queen's name had been involved in the intrigue.

During the supper, d'Artagnan never ceased to keep an eye on Richelieu's old enemy, although he did this unobtrusively, not wishing to arouse the Duchess' suspicions. As the minutes passed by without incident, a growing look of uneasiness appeared on her face. At the slightest noise, her eyes would turn toward the door, assuming in succession a hopeful, then a disappointed look. The Musketeer noticed that the assistant who served them kept looking at the Duchess as if trying to catch her eye, and once he had seen a signal pass between them.

He redoubled his vigilance. Suddenly his attention was attracted by the entrance of the servant with the wine, a sly, secretive-looking individual. The man carried a hamper full of bottles, all sealed with wax. With extraordinary quickness, he took out two of the bottles, one of red wine, which he placed in front of the Musketeer, and one of white wine, which he put near the Duchess.

A very simple and natural procedure, surely. Yet why did Madame de Chevreuse tremble? Why, above all, did d'Artagnan, whose distrust would naturally have been aroused by this scene, suddenly depart from his usual prudent reserve and become talkative? The explanation must

be that the long restraint had become irksome to the impetuous Gascon, and the sight of the wine restored his southern liveliness. Whatever the reason, the Musketeer exclaimed gaily:

"On my word, that is more like it! It was about time. I was nearly perishing of thirst and weariness!"

He seized the bottle that had been placed in front of him, and poured a few drops into a glass, which he examined with the eye of a connoisseur. The wine sparkled in the light of the flambeaux.

"Splendid wine!" he remarked. "What a perfect color!"

He raised the glass, and inhaled the delicate aroma:

"And what a bouquet, really exquisite!"

The server had been following the Musketeer's actions with an anxious eye. But on this last remark, he smiled gently, and said quietly:

"Rhenish wine!"

"My favorite!"

D'Artagnan suddenly extended the bottle to his companion.

"Will Monsieur Bernard drink first?"

The Duchess held out her glass. But before the first drop could be poured, she quickly drew back her hand.

"No, thank you," she stammered. "No red wine! I can't bear it."

This amazing aversion, so suddenly and violently expressed, did not seem to disturb the amiable Musketeer in the least. In truth, this man, usually so prudent, seemed to

have abandoned all caution. Apparently he had not even noticed that Madame de Chevreuse's sudden refusal coincided with a covert signal from the butler. Still smiling, d'Artagnan took the bottle of white wine, and filled Madame de Chevreuse's glass. This time there was no protest.

The butler continued to watch the scene with an anxious eye, as if it were his duty to follow the wine to the very lips of the drinkers. When the Musketeer put down the white wine and poured himself out a glass of red wine, the attendent showed his satisfaction by a slight nod of the head. D'Artagnan looked first at the Duchess sadly, and then sharply at the butler. Impassive, the latter murmured:

"Monsieur is a true connoisseur."

D'Artagnan appeared to relish this compliment, and brought the glass to his lips slowly, as if to prepare himself for the reception of a priceless nectar. A slight smile hovered upon the butler's lips. Smiling more and more broadly d'Artagnan placed the glass, empty on the table.

From this moment, the Duchess' spirits seemed to revive. The frown disappeared from her brow, and she even began to do honor to the famous cuisine of *The Royal Oak*. And yet, for some incomprehensible reason, his companion's sudden transformation seemed completely to escape the usually watchful eye of the Musketeer. Instead, he became more and more contented, and his interest

seemed to centre only on this famous wine. In a cheerful voice he exclaimed:

"*Sandis*, comrade, we're at last in good humor again! On the word of a Gascon, I don't recognize you. Your face had become so gloomy that it almost froze me. We really looked more like conspirators engaged in some dangerous plot than jovial cavaliers."

The speaker did not seem aware of the alarmed look that appeared on his companion's face. The truth was that apparently the poor Gascon could see nothing this evening. He continued his monologue, with a loud laugh:

"And what caused such a transformation? Nothing but a glass of this priceless nectar. This wine must have fallen under the enchantment of Merlin!"

The Musketeer gaily seized the two bottles, one in each hand, and refilled the glasses.

"White wine for you, I know. Nothing but white! But I prefer this ruby liquid, the real blood of the vine! Isn't that true, my fine butler?"

The stiff face of the servant relaxed slightly.

"Look at the man, *cadédis!* He must be a wine-merchant who watches over his little army of bottles, and loves to see his wines appreciated by connoisseurs. No, no, that's not it! He's a kind old father who congratulates himself on having disposed of his daughters so successfully. Oh, what a fine fellow! He becomes gay whenever I fill my glass. He quivers with anticipation as the glass

approaches my lips. And then with what virtuous pride he watches the warming wine passing my lips."

The Musketeer put down the empty glass with a flourish.

"How pleasant it is to drink, when the man who watches obtains as much enjoyment as the man who drinks! Never have I been so happy!"

The voice and laugh of d'Artagnan sounded loud and clear. At the foot of the stairs, Mazarin's henchmen could hear the reassuring echo of it.

Madame de Chevreuse at last relaxed. She laughed at these sallies, at this contagious geniality. How could one remain downcast in the face of such a lively companion? His gaiety was spontaneous and friendly. Could this be the wise, the prudent, the cautious Musketeer? It was hard to believe it. The Duchess could not but ask herself whether in this sinister comedy about to be played, this man, this boon companion, were not also playing a rôle!

But no! The Duchess brushed aside the troublesome thought. How was d'Artagnan to have guessed the truth? His eye was clear and tranquil—surely the occasional sparkle in it was not the result of malice, but was only a sign of his high spirits! His voice was warm and sincere —if it had at times, a harsh, metallic ring, this could not be caused by irony. No, no, it was surely but a heightened point in his Gascon accent.

After all, if he had been suspicious, would he have drunk the wine? And here he was, emptying and filling his glass

with the most laudable regularity. No, a thousand times no! He could not possibly be suspicious. And how he drank! It was merely a matter of time before he must succumb to the soporific effect of the drugged wine, and fall sound asleep. Then, at last, would she be free. Without danger she could receive this Mazarin, who had such grave and important matters to communicate to her. Must she remain quiet, and let the Musketeer fall into this trap? Yes, alas! The honor, nay the life of the Queen depended on this interview! The casket, the star, *Remember!* Yes, only that counted.

Suddenly d'Artagnan collapsed. The smile died on his lips. The proud head sank slowly down, finally resting heavily on the table between his arms. The noble, valiant Musketeer had succumbed, vanquished. D'Artagnan slept, an inert mass, overcome by an ignoble sleep.

Then, as if he had waited for that moment, a man glided in noiselessly, closed the door behind the departing servant, and carefully pushed the bolts. Then, in this same feline manner, he approached the Duchess, and bowed low before her. As he straightened up, he showed the fine features, honeyed smile, and soft eyes of Mazarin.

"I am delighted," he said with a lisp, "to present my humble compliments to Madame, the Duchess of Chevreuse, the faithful friend of Her Majesty, the Queen."

The Duchess seemed scarcely to listen to him. She assumed a distant, haughty manner, glancing first at the insinuating newcomer, and then at the sleeping Musketeer.

She who had borne with ease the torrential fury of the great Cardinal felt herself tremble before this smiling Italian.

"After the lion, the snake!" she murmured with an almost imperceptible shudder.

CHAPTER II

VELVET PAWS

THE Duchess recovered her presence of mind at once. The Italian had purposely mentioned Anne of Austria's name in his opening greeting, and it was the sound of this name which enabled Madame de Chevreuse to regain control of herself. The Queen! The battle was to be fought around this unhappy, persecuted woman. The first skirmish had taken place between Madame de Chevreuse and the Cardinal, and the former had emerged victorious. But it would take all her courage, all her cleverness to win this time, and to escape from the subtle snares of her new opponent.

Madame de Chevreuse concealed her anxiety under a mask of complete impassiveness, and at once began the attack:

"You wished to speak to me, Monsieur Mazarin. This interview would never have taken place had the efforts of this loyal soldier succeeded. To allow you to see me, I have had to shut my eyes to the actions of your men. What have you to say? I am listening."

The Italian bowed, and then without haste drew up a comfortable chair in front of the fire that crackled gaily on the hearth. He took off his cloak and placed it carefully on a little stand near the chair.

"You will pardon my taking this place, Duchess," he said, "but it is devilishly cold and damp this evening. Here," he added, looking calmly at the Musketeer, while he warmed his feet in the heat of the fire, "here all goes well."

Then turning to the lady in his ingratiating manner, he asked:

"You have read my note?"

"Obviously!"

"Splendid! What did you think of it?"

As Madame de Chevreuse did not answer, he continued:

"Yes, what do you think of Monsieur Bernard's having left a pretty little casket at Barbette's? It was so lovely! How annoyed Monsieur Bernard must have been to misplace such a charming object!"

"I think," she replied disdainfully, "you attach, perhaps, an excessive value to this object."

Mazarin made a grimace.

"Oh, oh, such a pretty little box, of most precious wood, and sealed with a gold star. A real treasure! Monsieur de Richelieu, would, I am sure give a great deal to possess the casket which you so make light of."

"I do not understand you."

Mazarin gazed innocently at the ceiling.

"Oh, dear me! To think that such a mind should be thus deceived! . . . You will now understand. The Cardinal, as you perhaps know, has been searching for some time into all that concerns a certain little affair. A love affair—a very sacred personage. But—the heart has its own reasons!"

A deep sigh accompanied this statement.

"You doubtless know that the affair concerns the weakness a very great lady had for a handsome nobleman. A mere trifle! The whole thing happened sixteen years ago, and God grants forgiveness to all!"

The mobile face of the Italian, as he acted his part assumed an expression of great pity.

"But, alas, Monsieur the Cardinal is not God!"

A slight quivering of the lips was the only sign of the Duchess' emotion, but the Italian was quick to notice it.

"*Deo gratias!* I see you begin to understand. His Eminence feels certain that a proof of this intrigue exists. He is searching for it, but as yet has discovered nothing."

A cunning smile appeared on the speaker's lips.

"And this *living*, *tangible* proof exists!"

The Italian stressed those two words which Richelieu had used in his interview with the Duchess. Madame de Chevreuse smiled disdainfully as she remarked:

"Monsieur de Mazarin, you are without equal as an eaves-dropper."

"Bless me!" exclaimed the other, without the slightest emotion, "how else would I ever know what was happen-

ing! Yes, Madame, do you realize that we are discussing events that took place sixteen years ago! What was I then? A poor little boy who had no idea that he would ever interest himself in the love of a nobleman for a Queen!"

Without awaiting the effect of this first blow, he continued rapidly:

"So Monseigneur searches everywhere for this living, tangible proof. What would he say, *per Bacco*, if he knew that I possess it!"

"You!" exclaimed the Duchess with a startled cry.

"Ah, yes, beyond doubt, since I now possess Monsieur Bernard's casket."

Under the keen scrutiny of her adversary Madame de Chevreuse regained control of herself. For one terrible moment she had feared something else—a horrible revelation, the mere thought of which had shaken her self-control. Luckily, all was not lost. She could still defend herself.

"He does not know all!" she thought. "Courage! We haven't lost yet!"

Then advancing toward Mazarin and laying a hand upon his arm, she said:

"I think we might profitably have done with these riddles. You refer I presume to a supposed indiscretion of the Queen?"

"Did I mention Her Majesty?"

"Oh, enough of this hypocrisy, I beg you. We are alone; no one can overhear us. For once there is no danger that any one is listening at the key-hole—you are inside

the room. So you too believe that fable about the garden of Amiens, when the Queen is supposed to have forgotten her rank to favor Buckingham. You think you possess the proof of it. Before going further I await this supposed proof."

"Must I then tell you, my dear Duchess, what Monsieur Bernard's casket contained?"

"I should be delighted to hear the inventory."

"Just as you please. We shall admit, if you like, that the Queen did not love the noble Duke of Buckingham, that she was never interested in him. Yet you must remember that she made him the gift of certain diamond studs."

"There was a rumor to that effect," she answered with a disdainful shrug of her shoulders.

"These studs were enclosed in a box made of rare wood, and sealed with a gold star. A star, madame, that was the symbol of a celestial, divine, ethereal love. Unfortunately this gift almost proved fatal to the beautiful lover. There was a person near to the Queen who watched over her with jealous vigilance. The gift of the diamond studs was known to this person. Well, let me be brief. His Eminence suggested to the King that his wife appear at a ball, wearing the famous jewels."

Madame de Chevreuse interrupted him triumphantly:

"The Queen put an end to this calumny. She appeared at the ball wearing them about her neck."

Not in the least disconcerted, Mazarin lisped:

"How I regret that Monsieur d'Artagnan is so deep in

slumber. Perhaps he could throw some light on this miracle."

The Duchess bit her lip; the speaker was too well informed.

"The illustrious Buckingham kept the jewel case as a memento of the happiest hour of his life. In this doubly precious box the noble lover collected all the favors the Queen had given him. They were worthless trinkets, pieces of ribbon, crushed flowers, which only a lover's heart could hold sweet and precious."

Mazarin's low, musical voice sounded with a tender and voluptuous resonance as he called up these memories. In spite of herself, the Duchess felt almost hypnotized.

"And then came the tragic moment at Portsmouth! It was the twenty-third of August, 1628. The Duke fell under a coward's blow, never to rise again. As he held on to life for a few last seconds by the inconquerable force of his sacred love, Buckingham asked to see for the last time those mute reminders of a Queen's affection. His faithful servant, Patrick, brought him the casket. For a few more seconds the noble martyr clung to life. He then expired, madame, holding this casket in his trembling hands, and kissing these poor, empty favors, in which lived the memory of his beloved mistress."

This evocation of the past was too much for Madame de Chevreuse. A sudden tightening seized her throat, and tears filled her eyes. Mazarin seemed to have been waiting for this softening. He approached the lady, and in

a tone of unequalled tenderness breathed these words:

"Weep, Madame, weep for that noble gentleman, in whom flourished supreme gallantry. With him disappeared the last true representative of an age of nobility and chivalry. An assassin's dagger struck deeply into the most loyal heart that was ever sacrified to woman. With him died the most beautiful thing in this world: a great love. Weep, dear madame, weep without shame. Let your tears flow upon this casket, and consecrate these pathetic ribbons, these faded flowers. After sixteen years, your sacred tears can make them live again in their divine majesty."

With a quick motion, the Italian drew from his coat a casket made of precious wood. He opened it and held it suddenly before the eyes of the Duchess.

Madame de Chevreuse instinctively sprang back, as if recoiling from a snake.

"Well done!" she exclaimed, as she recovered her presence of mind. "The trap was admirably set. My congratulations, Monsieur de Mazarin. You are a great actor!"

"Good heavens, madame! *I* an actor!"

"You are on the wrong track," said the Duchess in a voice of crushing sarcasm. "Your finesse has failed you. This casket, stolen by you at Barbette's, proves nothing."

Mazarin shook his head.

"Do you deny that it is Buckingham's?"

"How should I know?"

"Read these words, madame, written by his dying hand: '*Remember, 23rd August* 1628.' Do you remember what happened on that date? Who could have traced those tragic words, except the man who on that day in his final agony addressed a last, supreme appeal to the heart of his beloved?"

"Perhaps! Admit that the casket was the Duke's. Does that prove its connection with the Queen?"

"Oh, my dear Duchess, let us not be too childish! Of whom, I ask, was he thinking, and to whom did he address that last appeal? There is only one person possible—the Queen!"

"Oh, there is no reason for such a supposition. It might have been to one of his mistresses. Good heavens! The Duke of Buckingham was no saint!"

Mazarin came nearer to the speaker, stung by her nervous laugh. Looking her in the eyes, he said in a vibrating voice:

"You forget, Duchess, that this casket was found at Barbette's in Monsieur Bernard's room. Well, you, *you*, madame, the Duchess of Chevreuse, the friend of the Queen, the confidante of Buckingham, are Monsieur Bernard. Who, except you, could have possessed these priceless mementoes? Who else would have preserved them so piously in order to remind the Queen, if she showed signs of wavering, of the secret bond that united you?

"These relics, brought to light after so many years, come from England. What an unfortunate coincidence, for it

is in London that you have your headquarters! No, do not try to deny it. You alone could call up again the voice of the dead, and repeat to the royal ears that last cry of agony —*Remember!*"

"So this is the fable you are inventing! I brought this casket from England, and showed it to the Queen last night?"

"Yes, last night, at the convent of the Carmelites. Will you dare deny that? I have witnesses! Must I call upon Monsieur d'Artagnan, to testify that he saw you leave the cloister?"

"I won't ask for such a miracle," she replied, sarcastically. "You forget that, thanks to your admirable attention, Monsieur d'Artagnan is no longer in a condition to answer."

Then casting a look of supreme contempt at her adversary, she added:

"Again I must congratulate you on your admirable plan. So this casket is mine, and I showed it to the Queen! You wish to make these poor, pathetic favors live again as witnesses against her. He who possesses them commands the Queen's heart, for he may speak to her, and, if necessary, threaten her as with a voice from the grave. He holds at his mercy his sovereign's life and honor. Yesterday, it was I; today, it is you! Do I now understand you?"

Mazarin bowed, smiling.

"So, you hold the Queen at your mercy," continued the Duchess ironically. "On leaving here, you will go, per-

haps, to the Cardinal, and betray her to him. He would pay well for this treason."

"The Cardinal is not rich enough to purchase such a secret!" he said, shaking his head.

Surprised at this remark, Madame de Chevreuse looked more closely at Mazarin. The Italian's treacherous soul appeared before her in all its nakedness. She read the truth reflected there. For once the wretch was speaking sincerely.

"It is so obvious!" she exclaimed. "Where have my wits been! The Cardinal is old and feeble. The star of Richelieu is declining, and a new planet already appears on the horizon. My poor Queen, how long have you been tricked and humiliated! And now at the moment of danger they turn to you their imploring faces, and stretch forth their eager hands. What a revenge!"

Her harsh laugh was more insulting than a blow.

"You wrong me, madame," Mazarin's clear voice continued, "I do not hope for either power or fortune from the Queen."

"For what, then?"

"A little affection!"

He uttered these words simply, humbly, in a tone of sincerity that surprised Madame de Chevreuse. She looked steadily for some time at this face of insipid beauty and honeyed grace. Here were the languorous eyes and the caressing voice that were well qualified to conquer a weak

soul, starved of love. She felt her heart sink, as she murmured:

"*You*—you after your master! Marazin after Richelieu. Yesterday the red Cardinal with his blood-stained hands. Tomorrow the little priest with his greedy hands. I prefer the other!"

The Italian bowed his head under this ourtburst of scorn. In a sad voice, quivering with suppressed emotion, he said:

"Do not mock me, madame. I am nothing; I know it full well. The Queen is everything! The Queen is the granddaughter of Charles V. The Queen is the Infanta of Spain. That is why I love her! Yes, it is my dream —why do you try to destroy it? You, madame, on whom I counted to help me to bridge the immense gulf that still separates me from her. You, who, with a single word, could remove her fears and scruples. You, finally, who could say to the Queen: 'Monsieur de Mazarin held your secret, he had it in his power to crush you, but, see, he humbly lays his weapons at your feet!' "

The Duchess listened to this outburst with incredulous amazement. He seemed to her the arch tempter, the infernal serpent, employing some irresistible charm.

"One word, madame, say just one word, and I will return this casket to the Queen. In exchange for the fortune which I voluntarily abandon, I ask only a little pity, a smile, her royal hand to kiss."

"Fool!"

"Fool? Ah, true—a fool."

"And if I refuse?"

"Why should you? You repulsed the Cardinal because there was the past between you—that great store of accumulated hatred and spilled blood. But I represent the future, and approach you carrying the olive branch. I extend to you a hand innocent of blood. Why should you scorn the friendship I offer?"

Gravely, Madame de Chevreuse answered:

"Because, I shall not betray the Queen to you any more than to your master."

On receiving a similar answer, Richelieu would have flown into a fury. But Mazarin did not even change color. With some bitterness and a trace of chagrin, he replied:

"So you deny me your friendship! The casket which I have brought here as a proof of the sincerity of my regard, you, for your royal friend, reject?"

"Yes!"

"Very good! I now have only one move left."

"What?"

"To take this casket to Monsieur de Richelieu."

"You would do that?"

"Is it not my duty as a faithful servant?"

"You would dare be guilty of such infamy?"

"Infamy, why so? Didn't you just now say that neither you nor the Queen had anything to fear from this revelation?"

Trembling with indignation, the Duchess answered defiantly:

"So be it! But listen to me carefully. Although your little romance is cleverly constructed, according to the rules of the art, it rests on a false basis. This casket did not escape from my hands—it was never in my possession!"

"Yet it was found yesterday at Barbette's."

"Granted, but Monsieur Bernard had left the place the previous evening."

"Impossible!"

"I can prove it."

"What a noble lie!"

"It is the truth! I swear to it on the word of a Rohan!"

Madame de Chevreuse extended her hand solemnly. The Italian, disconcerted, demanded:

"Will you also swear on your word as a Rohan that this is not the casket that the Queen once gave to Buckingham?"

Madame de Chevreuse with the noble air of a great lady answered defiantly:

CHAPTER III

D'ARTAGNAN'S NAP

"You must furnish the proof!"

"I shall find it, madame!"

"I defy you to!"

"I need only find the person who brought this casket to Barbette's."

"Good God!"

"Then I shall have the complete proof—a double proof. Ah, not bad, that. We'll soon have the tangible proof, the living proof."

"The living proof!" murmured the miserable Duchess.

Mazarin's voice resumed its honeyed, seductive tone. He had avoided a tragedy, and now the comedy began once more:

"I had put all my hope in you," he sighed. "I thought that if you and I were united by our affection for the Queen, we could save and protect her, comfort her in her sorrow. Alas, that dream has vanished! Heartlessly you close the door to her affection, which you could so easily open to me. You have made your decision. My task will

take longer and be more difficult, perhaps, but with God's help I shall carry it through!"

As he poured forth this torrent of words, he kept his piercing eyes fixed on the Duchess, who seemed lost in deep meditation. She appeared not to hear him. Her eyes were fixed upon the open casket, placed in the centre of the table. Did Mazarin guess the subject of her thoughts? At any rate he continued slowly to stroke his black silky beard.

"Madame, you refuse to recognize this casket. I must therefore conclude that some one else possessed it, and brought it to Barbette's. Who was it? You know the answer. You have already guessed it, but you do not speak. Ah! well, I will search! I will again bring to life these ribbons and these flowers; I shall penetrate the mystery of this box and discover the truth. That truth you conceal deep in your heart. In spite of yourself, however, it shines forth from your eyes, and makes your body tremble with the terror of it."

He had moved one step toward the table, and his outstretched hand was about to seize the casket. At his last words the Duchess had trembled violently. The game was almost up, and she must act quickly. With a swift movement she seized the casket. Her finger pressed a hidden spring, which snapped with a sharp sound, and a drawer opened in the false bottom of the casket. With a cry of triumph, the Duchess snatched an envelope, sealed with wax.

"Search now!" she exclaimed.

The Italian rushed forward and brutally seized her wrist.

"I was sure!" he cried. "I was sure the secret was there, and that you would betray it to me!"

His face had assumed a diabolical expression. He was no longer the humble, gracious priest, the gallant, charming gentleman! The spirit of the Neapolitan bully awoke in him, and broke through his mask. His soft eyes flashed cruel fires, his beautiful lips trembled, his slender white hands clutched feverishly, as if ready to choke some one.

But his struggle was short. With a sudden leap, Mazarin backed away from her, holding his hand to the back of his neck. Blood was pouring from a long cut.

"The devil!" he screamed. "She would have killed me!"

Trembling, pale, resolute, Madame de Chevreuse stood in front of him, holding in her hand a sharp knife which she had snatched from the table.

"Search, Monsieur de Mazarin," she said. "Seek for the mystery of the casket. You will now find it empty. I have seized the one essential document. You shall never have it!"

Defiantly, she held before the eyes of the Secretary of State, a parchment envelope, sealed with the arms of George Villiers, Duke of Buckingham. There was one word written on the outside: *Testament.*

"Buckingham's will!" exclaimed Mazarin.

"Yes, Buckingham's will, hidden by him at the last moment in this casket, where you were unable to find it. It was the sacred expression of his last wishes, confided by him to the faithful Patrick. That loyal servant disappeared thirteen years ago, perhaps dispatched by his master's assassins. Its injunctions have never been carried out, because it remained undiscovered. But here it is again! God has not allowed this parchment to be tarnished by hostile hands, by enemies who would use it as a weapon with which to torture an unhappy woman. A miracle was necessary to snatch this weapon from you. God has performed one!"

The exaltation of Madame de Chevreuse became almost terrifying.

"And I swear," she cried, "that the will of God shall be carried out!"

Mazarin, who had listened with close attention began to move toward the door. The Duchess stopped him with a commanding gesture.

"Do not call, it is useless! Your men would arrive too late. If there is no means to keep this from you except by destroying it, I shall do so."

"You dare not!" hissed Mazarin. "It would be a criminal offence to destroy an unexecuted will."

"Yes, rather than let you violate a secret of the dead, I will throw this into the flames. You shall not read those

divine words, even if I am forced to destroy them forever. If this be a crime, then let the guilt rest on your shoulders!"

The Italian paid no attention to this threat.

"You have willed it!" cried the Duchess. "No one shall ever know the last words of Buckingham!"

Pronouncing these words, she retreated to the fire-place, never once turning her back on her adversary, who was ready to spring on her at the slightest opportunity. Still keeping her eyes on Mazarin's face, she hurled the parchment into the fire.

The Italian uttered an infuriated cry. Rushing to the door, he drew the bolts, and cried:

"Ruvigny! All of you! Come to me!"

There was an ominous sound of rushing feet and clashing steel on the stairs.

"Seize that woman! Take her out of here! Lock her in the next room!"

The surprised soldiers hesitated to advance upon the cavalier with the pale, tragic face whom their maddened master had pointed out.

"Advance, *sangodemi!* It is only a woman! Seize her!"

"Too late," said the Duchess, coolly, "the fire has done its work. The miracle is accomplished!"

Mazarin let out a cry of fury, but, just as suddenly it expired in his throat. A pale smile appeared on his lips. Looking at the fire, he saw that the document had fallen

to the ground untouched. The intrepid Duchess had misjudged the position of the fire, and the parchment had landed to one side of the devouring flames. The Italian looked at it exultingly, as it rested on the floor a safe distance from the fire, near the boot of the sleeping d'Artagnan.

A triumphant smile now illuminated his face. To the Duchess, whom the men were dragging from the room, he called out ironically:

"Go, Madame! The miracle was, in truth, performed. God decided in my favor!"

Now alone, he made fast the bolts of the door, feverishly, and rushed to the fire-place. The rapturous glow of victory warmed his heart. At last he held the Queen at his mercy!

Suddenly, a cry of surprise escaped from his lips. The parchment! . . . The parchment which he had been about to seize, like a thief grasping his coveted booty, the parchment had disappeared!

"*Cornaro!*" he groaned.

He passed his hand over his eyes, and looked about in terror. Nothing was changed. He was alone, except for d'Artagnan who was still plunged in his drunken slumber. With trembling hands he searched among the coals. He kicked back the table viciously, and then thrust the Musketeer's outstretched leg out of his way. D'Artagnan groaned slightly, but did not awaken.

Mazarin stopped to reflect. Had he been the victim of

an hallucination? Had his inflamed imagination conjured up false visions? Had he really seen the parchment intact, or had it been devoured by the fire? No, no, he had seen it! There, near the Musketeer's boot. D'Artagnan! He looked with terror at the soldier. Then, brutally, he searched the man's shirt, coat, trousers, turning the pockets inside out, and examing every stitch of his clothing. The poor lieutenant, still unconscious, did not awake from his heavy stupor.

"Good God! I am mad!" thought Mazarin.

In his extreme distress, sobs shook the Italian's body. Heaven had favored him only to cast him down the more cruelly. The room swam before his blood-shot eyes. Suddenly a superstitious fear seized his soul. The swaggering manner of the Neapolitan bully disappeared, and he was now prey to an uncontrollable fear. He shivered and trembled as if racked by a fever.

"The miracle!" he gasped. "The miracle has been performed!"

As if to show this, the candles suddenly flickered and went out. The room was plunged in shadow. Mazarin looked around him, terror-stricken. His one desire was to escape from this room, haunted by invisible spirits, and perhaps filled with the wrath of a supernatural being. He seized the casket, and put back in it the poor favors which lay scattered about the room. Then, snatching his cloak, he fled in terror, not once looking back at the scene of this divine intervention.

THE slumbering d'Artagnan remained alone in the dark room, lighted only by the flickering flames of the fire.

Suddenly the noble Musketeer opened an eye. With great caution he raised his head. Little by little the handsome figure of the Gascon assumed a more natural appearance. And then, incongruous in this desolate scene, a smile appeared in d'Artagnan's lips.

His keen eyes explored the shadows of the room. Not a soul! He arose quietly, and stretched his cramped limbs. Moving softly to the door, he listened. Not a sound! He closed the door, and carefully bolted it. Returning to the table, he took a bottle and held it up to the faint light.

"Red wine! No, thank you very much!" he said, laughing noiselessly. "I can't bear red wine. The very sight of it sickens me!"

He tried another bottle.

"White—good!"

He poured out a glass, and emptied it quickly.

"Ah," he sighed. "That's better! There is nothing so hard as to eat without drinking," and then he added, "I am almost falling asleep as I stand here. Well, after all, I haven't slept for two nights."

And the Gascon smiled as if recalling some pleasant memory. Then, once again looking around the room with infinite precaution, he leaned over and reached into the depths of one of his boots.

"What a careless searcher! This Monsieur de Mazarin isn't as clever as I feared."

He drew something white from his boot, and examined it carefully. This white object bore a striking resemblance to a piece of folded parchment, fastened by a wax seal. Still laughing silently, the Musketeer slipped it into a secret pocket on the inside of his shirt, just over his heart. Then he stretched again, and yawned contentedly. Seeing the comfortable chair in which Monsieur de Mazarin had been making himself at home, he sank into it with a sigh. He stretched his legs in front of the fire, and folded up his coat for a pillow.

"At last," he sighed, "good night!"

Then, in a low murmur, he added:

"Poor Queen! So it is written that d'Artagnan shall watch over you—even when he sleeps!"

With these enigmatic words, the brave Gascon closed his eyes. He needed no other soporific than fatigue, and soon slept—this time in earnest.

CHAPTER IV

CYRANO IN LOVE

We must return to Cyrano, whom we left in the Rue de la Bourbe, near the convent of the Carmelites.

After his amazing duel with d'Artagnan, the poet suddenly found himself alone in the street. With spontaneous, enigmatic abruptness, the other actors in this scene had vanished. All of them, his silent adversary, Monsieur Bernard, and the Cavalier himself. Cyrano remained for some time in the middle of the street, looking vainly for an explanation of these recent events. But the noble poet only found himself more and more perplexed. He shrugged his shoulders, and with a wry face, muttered:

"Politics again! Oh, the devil take Tancrède, he'll be caught in some trap as sure as my name is Cyrano!"

He was convinced it would be a long time before he saw either his new friend the Cavalier, or his enemy, the Musketeer. And he was right, as these two men were engaged at that moment in adventures that led them far away—the Cavalier following the Eastern Post Road in the interest of the Duchess of Chevreuse, and d'Artagnan hastening toward England under orders from Richelieu.

So alone and abandoned, Cyrano passed through the sleeping city toward the Quartier Saint-Martin. On his way he continued to experiment with rhymes for the famous ballade, begun on the corner of a table in *The Pineapple.* Throughout the vicissitudes of this extraordinary night he had never had his mind off the poem for long, and the composition surely should have proved a masterpiece. However, a fickle fate was to prevent the poet from completing it.

The first light of dawn was already playing on the windows of the church of Saint-Nicolas-des-Champs when Monsieur de Bergerac put his key into the lock of a little door on the Rue Grénetail. From the house extended a sign on which was painted a sheep, surmounted by these words:

THE WHITE SHEEP

M. COQUILLART, MERCHANT-DRAPER

THE tardy Cyrano entered a dark hall, and felt his way to the bottom step of a narrow stairway. He then seized the banister, and started to go up the two flights that led to his little room on the top floor. Cautiously he ascended the steps, treading on tip-toe, and had nearly reached the first landing when his scabbard came unfastened and pitched down the stairs with a clash that re-echoed through the house.

Suddenly, almost opposite the poet, a door opened, and

the vision of a pretty young girl appeared before his enravished eyes. In her hand she held a lamp, by the light of which she tried to distinguish the figure hidden in the shadows of the stairway.

"It is you, Jean?"

Disconcerted, the poet remained where he was, not speaking a word.

"Come quickly. Why are you so slow? Has all gone well, Jean?"

In her anxiety, she stepped further out into the landing.

Hat in hand, Cyrano covered the few steps that separated them, but alas! he might well have hesitated longer, for at the sight of him she fled backward with a frightened cry and stammered confusedly:

"Why, Jean, it's not you?"

"No, it's not I . . . or, rather, I'm not Jean."

In spite of herself, his reply amused her, and she smiled —a smile so engaging that involuntarily he repeated:

"No, I am not Jean . . . and how I regret it!"

Somewhat confused by the situation in which she found herself, the beautiful, brown-haired girl seemed suddenly to realize the scantiness of her attire. Her quick and not altogether successful attempt to draw her dressing-gown more closely about her caused Cyrano to murmur:

"Surely, it is unpardonable in this Jean to keep so charming a young lady waiting. Also, Mademoiselle, you will catch a severe cold in this night air. And," as he saw her vain attempts to draw about her more closely, in her con-

fusion, the dressing-gown, "if I may venture to assist . . ."

"You are mistaken," she said, blushing deeply, "I am expecting my brother . . ." and, as she saw his incredulous look, she repeated:

"Yes, my brother, who should arrive tonight from a long journey. And so, since I was expecting the arrival of a cavalier, I believed . . . I thought . . . Please accept my excuses."

Before she could withdraw, the poet, with an instinctive movement, blocked her retreat. With deep feeling, he said:

"Excuses are quite unnecessary, Mademoiselle, and, if you will permit me, I bless the happy chance that has confused me with another who is dear. . . ."

How far he would have continued with this madrigal, it is hard to say, but the young girl, with a slightly mocking smile, said:

"My dear neighbor, what a conversationalist you are! But it is late and cold, and you must allow me to bid you good night."

With a curtsey that was both graceful and saucy, the lovely vision vanished behind the closed door. The darkness now seemed to the poet more dense than before with the double loss of the light of the lamp and of her eyes. Retrieving his scabbard and starting once more toward his room, the poet muttered:

"*Capédédiou!* What a success I made of that! And now, Savinien, my son, you would better keep away from

mocking brown eyes. Go to sleep, and forget her."

A wise resolution, but most difficult to keep. The poor poet tossed on his bed unable to close his eyes, haunted by the fair face and the mocking smile of his unknown neighbor. He recalled every detail of their meeting. It was well past noon when Cyrano, after vain efforts at repose, settled himself in the great arm-chair which was his principal piece of furniture.

This venerable chair was placed carefully by the open window before a little table. On the latter rested the poet's literary equipment, an ink-stand, a long quill pen, and a stack of white paper. One side of the table was occupied by a small box in which could be seen a confused pile of manuscripts, mathematical instruments, broken pens, and numerous odds and ends. This spot was the retreat of the poet, the mathematician, the thinker.

On the wall opposite the table was a large rack adorned with numerous weapons of all shapes and ages—pistols, blunderbusses, swords, rapiers. In the centre of this arsenal hung the embroidered coat and plumed hat of a cadet of the guards. All this warlike equipment was quite in keeping with the room, which looked more like a soldier's tent than the chambers of a Parisian. The only furniture besides the chair and table was a small camp cot.

Cyrano glanced carelessly at these familiar objects, and then looked out of his window at the dull perspective of roofs and chimneys. Suddenly his attention was attracted to a window opposite his own and a little lower down.

Only the height of a short flight of stairs and the width of a narrow court separated him from this window. And the distance seemed even less because of the roof of a shed which sloped gently from the window of his room to that of the other. A hundred times he had faced this window, without giving it special attention. Why did he gaze so long at it now, and why did he sigh as he gazed?

Suddenly the poet pulled himself out of this contemplative mood and said to himself, abruptly:

"Come, Savinien, to work!"

He began to write hastily, but would often scratch out a sentence, as soon as he had finished it. Gradually he wrote with less energy, and, finally stopped, pen poised in mid-air and eyes lost in vague contemplation. The magic spirit of spring no longer guided the poet's usually fertile pen. Inspiration, capricious fairy, is a woman who does not wish to share her lover with another. She has a thousand malicious ways of obtaining revenge on a faithless devotee. The distracted Cyrano was now haunted by the face of his lovely dark-haired neighbor. He threw down his pen, and again fell into a profound meditation.

Suddenly the sound of a door opening was heard. Instinctively Cyrano rushed to his own door, and, on the landing below him, saw the lovely brunette. She seemed to hesitate a moment before descending the stairs. Dressed, apparently, for a walk, she was more beautiful, more desirable than ever, in her smart costume, her hair carefully curled and adorned with a tall plume, and a patch daintily

placed at the corner of her mouth. Unfolding her fan, and giving a quick, caressing glance toward the transfixed poet, whose presence she had sensed, the lovely girl descended the stairs.

Cyrano did not try to fight against his passion. He was a man of action, and in a situation like this there was only one thing to do—to act. So, returning to his room, he seized a hat and coat, and bounded four steps at a time down the stairs. He reached the outer door in time to see the girl turn to the right. Resolutely he followed after her.

At that moment a horseman turned the corner of the Rue Grénetail. A strange figure! He looked like some gaunt goblin; a long, cat-like moustache increased this strange appearance. Nor did his torn and tattered clothes add to the attractiveness of his looks. He had evidently been on a long and arduous trip. Yet he held his head high, and rode his horse proudly. And, in truth, the horse was a noble animal, with long legs, fine head, and sinewy body. The difference between horse and rider was so striking that a large group of street urchins and idlers followed the stranger down the street.

Master Coquillart, attracted by the noise, rushed to the shop door. After one look at the newcomer he threw up his arms, crying:

"God bless me! It's my lodger, it's Monsieur Vauselle!"

The horseman, who had seen the retreating Mlle. Minou,

paid no attention to this greeting, but hastened up the street after the girl, who was closely followed by Cyrano. He quickly drew abreast of them. Leaping from his horse, he advanced toward her with open arms. At the same moment the poet quite out of breath, caught up with the young lady, and made a low bow. The surprised girl, now accosted on both sides, drew back a step.

This sudden retreat caused a singular tête-à-tête. As the poet straightened up, he saw in front of him, not the pretty face of the girl, but the tall, gaunt figure of a man, who, advancing rapidly, threw his arms about the neck of the astonished Gascon.

"*Sandious!*" exclaimed Cyrano, blind with anger, "what is this jackanapes about?"

With a vigorous push he broke away from this close embrace.

"Softly there, be careful! You've torn my doublet!" cried the annoyed horseman.

"Devil take it! Why don't you look before you leap? Is it now the custom to embrace strangers! Pah!"

The two men glared at each other, like cocks about to fight. The intervention of the young girl came just in time. With a cry of joy, she grasped the newcomer's hand, and said fervently:

"Jean, Jean, you're back at last. Is everything well with you?"

Cyrano, thunderstruck, made a wry face. As for Jean, he fixed a look of insolent triumph on his adversary. The

girl felt that another storm was brewing, and hastened to explain:

"This gentleman is a fellow-lodger. We have met twice accidentally."

Then turning to the glowering poet, she added, pointing to the bedraggled newcomer:

"My brother!"

After this somewhat brief introduction, she thought it wise to lead "Jean" to *The White Sheep*, away from a possible field of battle.

Cyrano, boiling with impotent rage, watched them disappear arm in arm. His erstwhile adversary threw a coin to the boy who was holding his horse, and then said insolently to the astonished draper:

"Put this priceless horse in the stable, Master Coquillart. Take care of him as if he were pure gold. His name is *Capitan*—a Duchess was kind enough to make me a present of him."

Then the newcomer followed his pretty sister into the lodgings.

"Her brother!" groaned Cyrano. "A fine blackguard! How I should like to put a few more holes into the rascal's clothes! Well, there's another dream gone! The end of one more adventure! With me the end always comes at the beginning!"

A sight both amusing and alarming suddenly interrupted this gloomy monologue. Master Coquillart, obeying the peremptory orders of his lodger, had seized the horse by

the bridle and was attempting to lead him toward the stable. But the capricious animal not approving of his inexpert groom, balked and champed his bit so viciously as to alarm the clumsy Coquillart. A large group of idlers that had been inspecting the horse with expert eye, began to laugh at the good man's embarrassment, and the small boys goaded on the high-spirited horse.

The triumphant arrival of the Sieur Vauselle had filled the draper with such pride that he felt he must boast to some one about this great event. He saw Cyrano walking toward him, and hastened to call out:

"The gift of a Duchess, did you hear, Monsieur de Bergerac? What an honor to the stables of *The White Sheep!* Now, *Capitan,* carefully!"

These last words were addressed to the horse, which, on Cyrano's approach, had begun to neigh, and act more gently. The poet's first thought was to rebuff his host's familiar advances. But it occurred to him that he knew nothing about the lovely unknown and her long-limbed brother, and that this was a good opportunity to ask Master Coquillart about them. Also, as a gentleman, he admired fine horses, and this noble steed greatly pleased him with its black coat and princely trappings.

"A fine animal," he remarked. "What a pity that it should have such a rider!"

"Oh, Monsieur de Vauselle is a gentleman; it is dangerous to judge people on first sight."

"First or last, his face could never be prepossessing."

"Perhaps. But remember the proverb—clothes don't make the man. Careful, *Capitan!* That man, sir, has among his friends some of the most important personages in France."

"It's a pity he hasn't some tailor among his friends who could make him presentable," muttered Cyrano to himself. Aloud, he said:

"Vauselle, you say?"

Solemnly, the draper began:

"Jean-Baptiste L'Hermitte de Vaus—"

He was forced to stop, as *Capitan* showed renewed signs of impatience.

"Gently, now! Good boy!"

"Give me the bridle, you don't know how to handle a horse."

The merchant hastened to avail himself of this offer. Cyrano slackened the curb chain, and, caressing the impatient animal, soon calmed him. He then handed over the bridle to the draper.

"You were speaking of this Vauselle?"

"Ah! Where was I? Oh, yes! He's engaged in important affairs—affairs of State," added the good man puffing out his cheeks knowingly, and giving Cyrano a sly wink. "Affairs of State have obliged him to make a long trip in the east. He must have had his troubles on the road. There are so many robbers on the highways!"

"Nonsense! One wolf doesn't attack another!"

Master Coquillart listened in amazement to this remark

about his favorite lodger. The poet, feigning indifference, asked:

"And his sister?"

"The sister? Hmm! His sister—!"

"What do you mean?"

Capitan suddenly balked, and the merchant had no time to answer. The curious group of idlers had crowded again around the nervous animal, causing him in his excitement to kick furiously.

"Ho, there, quiet, *Capitan!* Good horse!" cried the poor fellow.

The aristocratic steed, not at all soothed by such exhortations, determined to make these people keep their distance. A few kicks soon widened the circle of onlookers. Poor Coquillart, holding on desperately implored Cyrano's help.

The poet seized the bridle, and *Capitan* at once became calm.

"Well, the sister?" asked Cyrano, taking advantage of the quiet. "Who is she?"

"Oh, good heavens, the sister is . . . ! Devil take that horse, I'm sweating all over! Well, to tell you the truth, this 'sister' has all the appearances of an adventuress!"

Cyrano, indignant, glared at the draper.

"An adventuress! She?"

"Oh, the Lord keep me from ever speaking ill of any

one! Yet it's well known that actresses are sometimes of dubious character."

"An actress? That girl is an actress?"

"Didn't you know that? She's recently arrived from the provinces, and is now playing in a company of Marais."

"An actress!" repeated the poor poet mechanically.

In an excess of disappointment, he let go of the horse's bridle. The merchant hastened to seize it, and then asked in astonishment:

"Are you really interested in the woman?"

"You say she is playing in Marais' company? Under what name?"

"Under what name?"

"Yes, of course—what's her stage name?"

"Oh, I see! She's called Mademoiselle . . . Ma . . . whoa, *Capitan*, whoa, whoa, whoa!"

The horse seemed to become excited again at being passed from hand to hand, and now, deserted by Cyrano, had decided to protest against this neglect. He suddenly bolted, dragging with him the poor draper.

"Help! Help! Dear Monsieur de Bergerac!"

Cyrano ran after the horse and grasped the loose bridle. *Capitan* stopped at once.

"Now, now!" said the poet. "Behave yourself!"

The animal, calmed as if by magic, returned with Cyrano as gentle as a lamb. Puffing and sweating, the merchant picked himself up, and exclaimed:

"Curse the beast! I can't understand him. One would swear that he will let no one touch him but you."

"He is merely accustomed to the hand of a gentleman. Now, Master Coquillart, tell me the name of the young woman."

"Ah, she interests you? Well, she is called Mademoiselle Minou."

"Minou!"

The poet sighed deeply as he repeated softly this name, which rhymed with almost all of his Gascon oaths. Then he murmured, as if to himself:

"How can such a charming girl be the sister of that scoundrel!"

"What! Monsieur de Vauselle a scoundrel? Well, to tell the truth, I don't care to displease you, Monsieur de Bergerac, but that sister, hmm . . . well, she may not really be his sister!"

"What do you mean? Out with it!"

"Oh, *mordieu*, sir, M. de Vauselle is no more her brother than I am."

"Her lover, then?" the poet cried. Overwhelmed, he started to walk away. But the terrified merchant seized him, saying:

"For heaven's sake, Monsieur de Bergerac! Don't leave *Capitan*. If you do—some one will be hurt!"

A new incident kept Cyrano from replying to this outburst. At that moment a small rotund man came in sight who seemed to roll rather than run down the street. He

rushed up to the astonished draper, and pointed to the horse, demanded abruptly:

"Whose is it?"

Master Coquillart looked in astonishment at the newcomer. Before him was a Capuchin friar, his cassock tucked up, and his ruddy face covered with sweat.

"I ask you if that is your horse?" repeated the monk in the same aŭthoritative voice.

"No, no, no, it's not mine, really!" gasped the frightened draper.

The Capuchin turned fiercely to Cyrano.

"Whose is it, then?"

"He belongs to one of my lodgers," answered Master Coquillart, as the poet showed no inclination to speak.

"His name?"

"*Capitan!*"

The expression on the monk's face was so idiotic, that Cyrano could not refrain from laughing.

"Are you mocking me? Why do you laugh, you there?"

"Because of good Master Coquillart's blunder, reverend sir."

"The devil! I understand yoŭ. Come, fellow, I want the name of the master, not the horse."

"Vaŭselle, good father, L'Hermitte de Vauselle."

"A great, gaunt man, with an arrogant air and torn clothes?"

"Bravo!" exclaimed the smiling Cyrano. "A perfect description!"

"The man has come from Sedan, hasn't he?"

"Well, I . . . I don't . . ." stuttered the poor draper, ill at ease. "I think perhaps . . . I believe that . . ."

"That's enough!" cut in the other.

The monk glanced quickly at the crowd this interview had attracted, and said in a low voice to the merchant:

"Come inside. We can finish this conversation better there."

The worthy father waited for no answer, but pushed poor Master Coquillart into the shop, and shut the door at once.

"Well, well!" exclaimed Cyrano. "How very rude! And they've left the horse with me!"

He was about to follow after the Capuchin, but stopped a moment to glance at *Capitan*. The noble horse pawed the ground contentedly, as if delighted to be rid of this Coquillart. He turned toward the poet eyes which sparkled with a proud fire. In spite of himself, Cyrano was touched.

"*Sandious!* There's something about this *Capitan* I like. He's just played, unconsciously, an excellent trick on his master. Capuchins never follow a man unless the Red Cardinal has given the order! No, I mustn't abandon the splendid animal. Come, *Capitan*, my boy! To the stable! You'll not be neglected!"

The horse followed his new friend peacefully. Ah,

had *Capitan* been able to speak, how many interesting things could he have confided to Cyrano. Imagine the poet's surprise had he known that his friend the Cavalier had been on this horse a few hours before. His hatred of Vauselle would, if such a thing were possible, have doubled had he realized that Vauselle had stolen the horse from the confiding Tancrède.

As Cyrano left the stable, he saw that it was already late, and that in the excitement of the day he had forgotten to eat. One may be a poet and in love, but appetite will have its way. Before leaving, the Gascon made sure that all was peaceful. The Capuchin had disappeared, and Master Coquillart was bent over his desk examining his accounts. *The White Sheep* was quiet, and the Rue Grenetail, recovered from this unusual excitement, had resumed its placid appearance.

Cyrano walked quickly toward a little restaurant on the Rue Saint-Martin which he frequented when he was not dining with Saint-Amant at *The Pineapple*. After a hearty meal and a bottle of good Burgundy, the poet felt that the world was not as dreary a place as he had thought. The vision of the lovely lodger still haunted him, but with less persistence.

When he returned to his room, it was already evening. The last light of the setting sun had disappeared and all was quiet. The poet remembering the previous sleepless night, decided to retire early. Without lighting his lamp and still dressed, Cyrano threw himself on his cot, where

he remained for a long time, half awake, half asleep. On the floor below Mademoiselle Minou was celebrating the return of her "brother," and the sound of clinking bottles and glasses, and the rattling of plates came to the poet's ears. Now and then he could hear the silvery laugh of the girl and the harsh cackle of the man.

At last the noise of laughter, songs, bottles, dishes became blended into a confused harmony that lulled the poet to sleep. Minutes, perhaps hours, passed. . . . Suddenly a loud noise awakened Cyrano. There was the sound of heavy feet on the stairs, an ominous rattling of swords, and finally a loud knock. The poet opened wide his eyes and wondered if he were dreaming. All was calm about him; his bed was bathed in pale moonlight.

He was about to close his eyes again, when, looking through the open window, he saw a shapeless mass move swiftly up the roof of the shed that led to his window. Before he could verify this impression, this mass had pushed through the window and fallen on the floor at the foot of his bed.

Now the Gascon was fully awake. He jumped to his feet, and seized his rapier, ready for any emergency. Suddenly, he stepped back aghast as he saw this dark mass arise and assume the form of a man. In front of him was the abhorrent face of his rival, the Sieur de Vauselle. The impetuous swordsman's first instinct was to rush at the man with drawn blade, and force him to make a speedy exit

through the same opening by which he had entered. He started to carry out this design, but as he roughly seized the man he felt him tremble violently. Cyrano, always easily impressed by frailty, looked more closely at the cringing wretch.

Vauselle, pale and shaking, no longer possessed the arrogant appearance of the rider of *Capitan*, or the superior complacency of the "brother" of Mademoiselle Minou. Like a trapped animal, he fixed on his former adversary a frightened look, full of mute supplication. Hot blood cools quickly. The wrath of Cyrano—who was called by his friends in the guards "the demon swordsman"—suddenly lessened, and he relaxed his vice-like grip on the wretch's collar.

"Well, what are you doing here?" he demanded.

The fugitive fell to his knees, and, with tears pouring from his eyes, replied:

"In the name of all you hold sacred, no noise. One word and I am lost."

"Lost?"

Vauselle did not answer. He listened fearfully to the noise on the stairs. Some one was still knocking vigorously on the door.

"Shh!" murmured the intruder, a finger on his lips.

As Cyrano started to open the door to see what was happening below, the man grasped him by the knees and exclaimed supplicatingly:

"Don't move, I beg in the name of Mademoiselle Minoū."

Did this prayer reach the poet's heart or did he stop merely out of curiosity?

CHAPTER V

MADEMOISELLE MINOU'S "BROTHER"

"Why do you invoke the name of Mademoiselle Minou?"

"Whatever your feeling toward her, you would not wish to ruin a young girl?"

Cyrano, after a moment's reflection, spoke rapidly:

"She is in danger?"

"You may save or destroy her!"

"How?"

"By saving or destroying me."

Cyrano made a gesture of doubt, which did not escape the supplicant's searching eye. He hastened to add:

"I realize that you have no sympathy for me. But I beseech your mercy in her name, not mine."

This remark coming from such a rascal might have appeared too obvious and hypocritical. But it touched the heart of the impressionable Cyrano.

"Very well! What do you wish me to do?"

"First, please shut that window, but don't let yourself be seen."

Cyrano, without a word, obeyed the man's request. Vauselle looked timidly around the room.

"How lucky there's no light! They'll never suspect that I've hidden here!"

The poet's quick ear caught these softly spoken words.

"What is this game?" he asked, turning around, and looking fiercely at the intruder. "About whom are you speaking?"

"Why, *parbleu*, the police. When I heard them coming, I had the presence of mind to jump to the roof. Heaven be praised, I was just in time!"

"The police!" exclaimed Cyrano, suddenly understanding. "Yes, of course, I had forgotten the . . ." Then, turning quickly on Vauselle, he asked:

"What's to happen to Mademoiselle Minou?"

Vauselle shrugged his shoulders slightly, as if altogether indifferent to such matters of sentiment.

"Why, wretch, did you leave the poor child all alone in the hands of those men?"

"Oh, don't worry, the girl can take care of herself."

"*Sandious!*" exclaimed Cyrano, exasperated by this indifference. "Leave a woman to face those birds of prey! It's baseness unworthy of a gentleman!"

Without another word, he began to open the door. But Vauselle had already thrown himself on the poet, panting, and grasped his coat with all his strength. While thus holding him, he whispered:

"Don't be a fool! If she's alone, she can say I'm not there. She's had time to remove all traces. If you go down there, I'm lost and she, too!"

The poet hesitated.

"Listen!" insisted Vauselle, pointing toward the door. "She has opened the door. The men are entering. Don't move! You see that everything goes well so far. If you go down, you will spoil things!"

"For you, yes—but for her?"

"Why, *mordieu*, if they found her in my company do you think either of us could escape prison?"

"Why should they punish a sister who protects her brother?"

A strange smile that appeared on Vaūselle's lips was his only answer. Yet it seemed to satisfy the poet, whose heart was beating furiously.

"I understand!" he said, closing the door. "You may stay!"

He now realized the truth. Master Coquillart had not deceived him. Mademoiselle Minou was not this man's sister. But the noble Gascon had made a generous resolution. He would not turn Vauselle over to the police, and thus obtain revenge on the rascal, and on Mademoiselle Minou, who had spurned him. He refused to stoop to such base revenge.

"I'm all right now!" thought Vauselle, happy again, and resuming his habitual insolence. "This romantic fellow will never betray us."

With the most imperturbable coolness, he stretched out comfortably on his host's bed. Cyrano continued to pace the room impatiently. Finally he stopped to draw aside the

curtain and look out the window toward the actress' room.

"Well, well!" he muttered to himself, "the rascal was right. Mademoiselle Minou has received her guests with the greatest courtesy."

"How many are there?" inquired Vauselle.

"About a dozen. They're searching every corner of the room."

"Let them search!" hissed the fugitive.

"A huge man is helping them. His hand trembles, as he holds the light. He must be frightened. Why, *verdious*, can I be mistaken? No, that trembling, shaking hulk is our kind host."

"Master Coquillart? Oh, the traitor! He's sold me to the Cardinal."

Cyrano looked ironically at the bedraggled fugitive. His eye ran up and down the man as if to weigh his worth, and he remarked in a slight tone of disgust:

"Sold to the Cardinal? The great man has then money to throw away?"

The poet turned again to the window. The arrival of another figure, no less rotund but more picturesque, than Master Coquillart, sent Cyrano into a fit of laughter.

"And I know that fellow, too! I could never forget such a wonderful beer-barrel of a man. Well, the whole family is here now that our reverend Capuchin father has joined the group."

"A Capuchin!" exclaimed Vauselle, jumping up.

"What troubles you? Yes, a Capuchin. He's the same

worthy man who discovered your nest this afternoon when he recognized *Capitan.*"

"He again!"

"That's the danger of having a horse that is so . . . so striking."

Vauselle was in no mood to enjoy these pleasantries. The reappearance of his obstinate pursuer threw him into a panic, and caused him to lose the assurance that was just beginning to return to him.

"Oh!" he moaned. "It's no use. I escape Charybdis to run into Scylla. I'll never shake that hound off my trail. He's made a bargain with the devil to purchase my skin!"

"Hmm! An unnecessary purchase! I thought the red Cardinal was pretty sure of that skin himself," said Cyrano, laughing quietly.

The poet listened to the groans of the intruder with a malign joy. He was not at all displeased that this man, whom, against his will, he was saving, should feel the cold sweat of approaching death. But suddenly Vauselle seemed to have recovered his composure. Cyrano was surprised and somewhat disappointed.

A new idea must have come into his head, for a smile appeared on his face, and he ceased tearing his hair and began to rub his hands contentedly:

"Ah, that's it!" he said, as if to himself. "Why shouldn't I? It's either that or a rope's end. . . . If I should, my skin is safe once more. . . . And I'd cut the

ground from under that cursed Capuchin's feet. Thank God, one knows his price. . . . That's worth considering."

This sudden change mystified Cyrano, who, desirous of finding the reason for it, asked:

"Well, do you feel better?"

"Much, thank you. The thought of playing a good trick on this monk fills my heart with joy."

"You don't care for him?"

"He's the greatest rascal among all my pursuers. He sticks to me like a leech. Three times have I escaped him. I still shudder at the thought of the last escape. I was caught like a fish in a net—if it hadn't been for that pleasant young man . . ."

Vauselle stopped to smile at some agreeable recollection. He talked on unconsciously, like one in a fever or perhaps like one thinking aloud. Cyrano, however, listened carefully, fascinated by the amazing changes of this chameleon—now humble and cringing, now arrogant and confident; one moment dejected and panic-stricken, the next proud and triumphant.

"A young man?" he asked.

As Vauselle looked at him suspiciously, Cyrano hastened to add:

"If I wished to betray you, I have only to say one word. You may as well trust me. You were speaking of a young man . . . ?"

Vauselle glanced stealthily at the honest face of his protector, reflected a moment, and then spoke:

"Well, after all, it's an amusing story! Yesterday I was at Coulommiers. I stopped off at *The Shield of France*, and, being flush with money, sat down to a dinner, ample for three men. Well, in the same room, I saw a poor young soldier eating a frugal meal."

"A young soldier!" exclaimed Cyrano, now very much interested.

"On account of his pleasant face and military bearing, I decided to ask him to share my meal. He accepted my invitation greedily, and we began to talk."

"Was this soldier quite handsome, with fresh complexion, light hair, and blue eyes?"

"Why, the very devil! do you know him?" cried the surprised Vauselle, looking at the poet suspiciously.

"Never mind," answered Cyrano, evasively, "continue."

"I found out that he was in the Flemish army, and was absent on leave . . ."

"There can be no doubt!" thought the poet. "It's the Cavalier! But what could he be doing at Coulommiers?"

"My face apparently inspired the soldier with confidence, for he soon began to talk freely to me."

"The young fool!"

"What did you say?"

"I? Nothing!"

"I thought you spoke. To continue. I learned that he was going to Sedan, to the Princes, and that he carried confidential messages."

Vauselle pronounced these last words slowly so as to see their effect on Cyrano. The result must have satisfied him. Cyrano was completely overwhelmed by this unexpected information.

"*Corbleu!*" he moaned. "Politics! Intrigues! Always politics! *Mordious!* I should have known what would happen when he left with that cursed Monsieur Bernard."

"Monsieur Bernard!" exclaimed Vauselle, suddenly excited. "Did you say Monsieur Bernard?"

"I did, and I will add that I wish Monsieur Bernard would go to the devil and stay there!"

A triumphant gleam appeared in Vauselle's eyes. Cyrano continued bitterly:

"Why didn't I know this sooner! Rather than let my dearest friend fall into a trap like that, I would have strangled this Monsieur Bernard . . ."

"Fiddlesticks!" interrupted Vauselle, sarcastically. "Strangle the Duchess!"

"What are you talking about? What Duchess?"

"What Duchess? Why, the one, unique, incomparable —the Duchess of Chevreuse!"

"The Du . . . Monsieur Ber . . . Madame de Chevreuse!" stammered the thunderstrück Cyrano. "The very devil! That completes the tragedy!"

In his feverish excitement the poet had completely forgotten the reason for Vauselle's presence. He walked up and down the room, speaking aloud in fragmentary phrases.

"I should have kept more awake . . . This Bernard—escaping an evil wind. . . . The nocturnal meeting at the Carmelites. . . . The Queen, of course! . . . And the presence of the Musketeer. . . ."

Vauselle did not miss a single word or a single gesture. He stared fixedly at his host as if he wished to engrave those features on his mind, with the further thought that some day there might be profit from it.

The poet suddenly stopped his pacing.

"Will you be kind enough, sir, to finish your story. What happened to the Cavalier?"

"The Cavalier . . . ?"

"Yes, to the young stranger at Coulommiers. Didn't you say in the beginning that he helped you to escape?"

"Yes. You see the sudden arrival of the Capuchin put an end to our pleasant conversation. The young man, to assist me in my flight, generously loaned me his horse."

"*Capitan?*"

"A noble animal! His speed enabled me to outdistance all my pursuers."

"But what happened to him then?"

"Him?"

"If he gave you his horse, how could he have escaped from the Capuchin's clutches?"

The question was embarrassing. The sly Vauselle had not foreseen it, and scratched his ear for several moments before answering in some confusion:

"He had a sword—and pistols. Moreover, his face is not so well known to the spies as mine. . . . You may be sure he got out of that predicament with no trouble."

Cyrano, unconvinced, continued to stare fiercely at the impostor, until Vauselle began to feel ill at ease.

"*Parbleu!*" exclaimed the poet. "Yesterday, like today, you wasted no time in saving your own skin. Yet you seem to have amazingly little interest in what happens to those you leave behind."

The fugitive tried to protest, but Cyrano cut him short as he continued coolly:

"Do you know what I'm thinking at this moment? I think there's some nasty trickery beneath all this. Yes, you've probably betrayed the man who helped you. I can't make up my mind whether, instead of saving your life, I should not break your cowardly neck."

As Vauselle listened to his host's calm voice, he trembled to the very marrow of his bones. He still tried, however, to appear confident, and asked:

"Whom do you take me for?"

"Yes!" continued the poet, gradually raising his voice, to the terror of the miserable fugitive, who feared this noise would attract the police. "Yes, that's what I should do! Twice already you have put in danger the safety, nay the lives, of innocent people. At Coulommiers you

snatched from the Cavalier his surest hope of safety—his horse. And here you have compromised a young lady in whom I am interested. It's too much!"

"What are you going to do? Will you betray me?"

Again there was the sound of footsteps and clashing arms on the stairway. The baffled agents of the police had at last decided to leave. It was a crucial moment for Vauselle. One word from Cyrano and he would be lost. His life was at the mercy of the man who had such good reason to loathe him, and who had just guessed the secret of his perfidy.

The two men stood motionless, listening to the fast retreating footsteps. For an instant the Gascon wavered, irresolute. Finally the terror-stricken Vauselle saw him make a gesture, as if dispelling a temptation.

"No, no," muttered Cyrano. "Such revenge is unworthy of me! My sword will guarantee the rascal's behavior!"

The hunted man breathed a sigh of relief. He was now out of danger for the time being. That was the one important thing. By the next day he would have put into execution the plan that was developing in his fertile brain. Then he would not have to fear the Capuchin or any other person in this world—quite the contrary, in fact!

"Well!" began Cyrano roughly. "Give thanks to the gods who made Cyrano de Bergerac a gentleman, and not a rascal, like certain men of my acquaintance. Remember one thing," he added, seizing Vauselle firmly by the shoul-

ders and looking straight into his shifty eyes, "remember this: I never want to find you in my way again!"

Now that the police had departed and his temporary safety was assured, Vauselle began to regain his former insolence. He looked at his adversary calmly, and re-replied coolly:

"What do you mean?"

The speaker twisted his moustache and grinned so broadly as to show his great wolf-like teeth. Cyrano, without relaxing his grasp and pronouncing each word distinctly, continued:

"Here are my conditions. You are to keep away from *The White Sheep*—that will not be unpleasant, as the air is not healthy for you here. Also, you will forget the imprudent confidences of my friend, the Cavalier."

"Well, well!" exclaimed Vauselle ironically. "So the young man is your friend! How does that happen?"

The poet again felt a strong desire to strangle the cowardly wretch, but, with difficulty, controlled his temper.

"Finally, you must cease to have anything to do with Mademoiselle Minou."

"My sister?" exclaimed Vauselle with consummate impertinence. "Do you wish to cause unhappiness in an affectionate family?"

"Sister or not, I tell you not to see her again!"

"And by what authority?"

"By the authority of a person who is ready, if you disobey his orders, to run his sword through you. Under-

stand me clearly. If you set foot in the young girl's rooms, it will not be the Cardinal and his agents who will search for you, but I myself, with this sword in my hand. And I venture to suggest that this time you will not find a hiding-place!"

During this speech the poet's eyes sparkled fiercely, and his whole bearing was one of complete determination. The sight of his drawn sword was so convincing that the Sieur de Vauselle, in spite of his insolence, thought it wise to offer no objections.

"Very well," he muttered. "I know now what my next step will be!"

"Yes, quite right, your next step is to get out of here, and be hanged to you," answered Cyrano, graciously. "By this time the road must be clear, and I wish to be rid of you at once."

Cyrano, opening the door carefully, made sure that all was quiet without, and then seized his guest by the shoulders and led him to the door. An afterthought induced him to accompany the man to the foot of the stairs.

When Vauselle reached the entrance, he turned to have a last look at his preserver, who had received him with such a strange mixture of kindness and insults. He could not forbear a last remark, and hissed out these words:

"Monsieur de Bergerac, I assure you that I shall soon repay this debt."

"Please do not trouble yourself to such an extent."

"No, no! L'Hermitte de Vauselle will forget neither

the favors nor the injuries he has received. This meeting in which I have come off second best will not be our last—rest assured of that! We shall meet again!"

Cyrano, indifferent alike to the man's threats and to his thanks, shrugged his shoulders. Vauselle was determined to have the last word. When he was well in the street, he turned back to say:

"Farewell, Monsieur de Bergerac. I give way to you. I also leave to you my two dearest possessions—*Capitan* . . . and my sister!"

With this last display of insolence, Vauselle hastened away, not waiting for an answer. Running quickly, he soon disappeared down the Rue Saint-Martin. It was a wise retreat, for Cyrano was at the end of his patience. He refrained from rushing after the scoundrel only with difficulty when he heard his impertinent reference to Mademoiselle Minou.

"Ouf!" he remarked, as he started to return to his room, "what a nasty business!"

On the landing of the floor above a delightful surprise awaited him. Mlle. Minou was there, watching for his return. The pretty girl was pale and there was a feverish brilliancy in her eyes. Running to him, she asked anxiously:

"Where is he?"

"Don't worry. He is safe."

"Thank you, a thousand times. It was you who saved him. I shall not forget."

In a transport of gratitude she tried to seize the poet's hand. He, however, repulsed her gently, and, with a voice trembling with emotion, said:

"You love this scamp, then?"

Surprised by the gravity of his tone, the young girl stopped short and then shot at him a glance that was at once a caress and a declaration of utter sincerity. In this mute reply there was a message of such tender coquetry and appeal that Cyrano felt his knees tremble beneath him.

With an air of astonishment, she stammered:

"You ask if . . . I love my brother?"

She saw at once the look of doubt and reproach in the poet's eyes, as if he would say: "Why deceive me? I know everything." With a toss of her head and a most charming pout, she whispered:

"Do I love him! . . . Well, in point of fact, is one *ever* sure in such matters?"

Then, as though confused by this confidence, which had assumed almost the nature of an avowal, she turned quickly away, leaving Cyrano in a state of the deepest agitation.

The heart of the poet beat furiously, his temples throbbed, a frenzy of joy seized him, when he reached his room it seemed too small to contain his buoyant spirits. If the heavens had then fallen, he would not have noticed it.

Opening his strong-box a moment later he suddenly discovered that the noble Sieur de Vauselle had not been

idle when his back was turned. The purse containing all his money, had disappeared. For some reason, this discovery did not greatly disturb Cyrano. He smiled good-naturedly, and murmured to himself:

"The rascal wasted no time! That's one more thing to charge to his account. Ah, well, even if he took my money, he left me *Capitan*. And, all in all, I have not done badly on the exchange."

At the price he had paid for the Cavalier's noble horse, the Sieur de Vauselle had not lost on the exchange either.

CHAPTER VI

THE HEART OF A QUEEN

THE two weeks following this memorable day were calm and without incident for Cyrano. The Sieur de Vauselle, carefully obeying his instructions, had not reappeared. The poet's friend, the Cavalier, was far away, fulfilling the Duchess of Chevreuse's mission. So the gallant Gascon was able to pursue without hindrance his delightful adventure with the fascinating Mademoiselle Minou. We shall, alas, soon discover what sinister events were taking place beneath this apparent calm, and what a storm was about to break over our hero.

For the moment we must return to d'Artagnan. The Musketeer was justly proud of the inactive but effective rôle he had played in the conversation between Mazarin and the Duchess. Yet he realized that the sly Italian had by no means been defeated, and that he would at once start to search for the *tangible, living proof*, on which the success of all his plans depended. D'Artagnan must act at once if he was to be of real assistance.

Unfortunately, the Cardinal's orders were strict. He

must conduct the Duchess to the first boat for England without delay. We have already discovered how obedient the Musketeer was to the letter of his instructions. But even if he could not himself return to Paris to watch over the Queen, it was possible to entrust this duty to a loyal substitute. There was about the Queen a group of faithful servants who, far from deserting her in her misfortune, were more anxious than ever to show their devotion.

The first man whom d'Artagnan thought of was Monsieur de Guitaut. He at once dispatched a messenger to the Captain of the Queen's Guards, asking him to hasten to Saint-Germain-en-Laye. That very evening the noble Guitaut arrived for the meeting. The two officers had a long conversation, at the end of which the Musketeer was able to continue his journey with a much lighter heart.

We shall leave Monsieur d'Artagnan and Madame de Chevreuse as they resume their journey together, and return to the Queen. Many plots were being woven about this poor lady and mines and counter-mines laid without her knowing that she was their object. We know already something of the mysterious bond that connects the Queen and Madame de Chevreuse. We cannot have forgotten how at the Convent of the Carmelites the recalling of one word forced the proud Queen to bend to her friend's indomitable will.

Between them there is, then, a secret. Both Richelieu and Mazarin suspect what it is, and both are trying desperately to obtain proof of it, so as to hold the Queen at

their mercy. By prayer and threat, the great statesman had tried to force this secret from his old enemy, the Duchess of Chevreuse. In vain! The crafty Italian had been more fortunate, and was about to grasp it, when a sudden miracle had snatched it from his hands.

On this May morning in 1641 the Queen is in her apartment at the Louvre. Since her return from the Carmelite Convent, her face has assumed a look of extreme sorrow and misery. Her eyes look straight ahead, but do not notice the charming effect of the warm sun on the gardens beneath her window, the circle of maids of honor grouped about her, or even the pretty figure of her favorite, Claire de Cernay, seated on a stool at her feet. On her knees the young girl holds the book from which she has been reading aloud, and looks sympathetically and tenderly at the unhappy face of her beloved mistress.

Suddenly the scene changes. One word has broken the enchanted silence. One magic word has caused the maids of honor to stand up in rigid attention, and the pretty Claire to slip into the background. Even the Queen seems to share this new excitement, and draws herself up proudly in her chair.

The officer in attendance had just announced:

"The King!"

In the respectful silence that followed, while all heads were bowed low, a tall gentleman in hunting costume entered the room. His thin figure did not lack a certain aristocratic elegance. A restless eye spoiled the frankness

of the face. This same air of indecision, could be seen in his entire bearing and in every gesture, giving an impression of constraint. The time in which he lived and, still more, the perpetual agony of a tortured soul, gave him a prematurely aged appearance. Such was Louis XIII, King of France and of Navarre at the age of forty.

Dismissing his attendants with a wave of the hands, Louis approached the Queen, and, looking at her with a troubled glance, bowed slightly.

"Still sad, Madame?"

An involuntary sigh was the only answer.

"I hoped that your retreat at the Convent of the Carmelites would dissipate this sombre humor. It has not, I see. You return more depressed than before."

"You are mistaken, Sire," stammered Anne, trying to bring a smile to her pale lips.

"Come! Must I never see anything but sad faces about me? It's bad enough to have the Cardinal troubling me with his endless sermons."

Like a school-boy venting his wrath against the severity of his master, the King petulantly kicked over a stool. Anne, amazed by this unusual familiarity, looked at her husband more carefully. As he seemed to hesitate to sit down near her; she hastened to put him more at ease:

"Has Your Majesty had a successful hunt this morning?"

The face of the King relaxed into a smile. He had been touched on his weak point.

"Splendid!" he answered, sitting down. "I imagine,

Madame, that together with Monsieur de Cinq-Mars. . . . But forgive me, I was forgetting that such details have little interest for you."

"On the contrary, Sire, I am most anxious to hear more."

"Really? I feared that I should bore you."

Smiling happily at this unexpected interest, the King proceeded with great gusto to tell of the incidents and vicissitudes of his favorite pastime. While speaking he became so excited that he abandoned his usual diffidence.

"Hunting is a royal sport!" he concluded enthusiastically. "Alas, the good old traditions are fast disappearing, and apparently only I myself and Monsieur le Grand . . ."

The King stopped suddenly to look around, and, making sure that no one else could hear him, continued:

"And they even want me to dismiss him! Good God! how should I ever keep from dying of boredom!"

At these words Anne had not been able to restrain a slight shudder. For the second time Louis had mentioned the name of Cinq-Mars. There must be some reason for this. Suddenly a ray of hope entered into the shadow in which the Queen had been so long engulfed.

"Sire," she said, "are you not allowed to choose your own friends? Are you not the King?"

"Eh, *jarnigué*, as my dear father used to say. I know quite well that I am, but the Cardinal . . ."

There was something almost furtive about the way the

King pronounced this name. Anne smiled a little scornfully.

"What has Monsieur de Richelieu to do with this? Isn't it enough that he has kept Your Majesty from such friendships as the humblest of your subjects enjoys? Isn't it enough that he has separated you from your mother, your brother . . ."

"Say wife, also."

Anne looked closely at her royal husband, surprised at such unexpected self-assertion.

"Yes," insisted Louis, "from you also, Madame! For many years the artifices of this arrogant minister have prevailed. Unjust suspicions have separated me from you."

The Queen could not keep from blushing, so confused and astonished was she by this amazing change in the King's manner. But the explanation came at once. Louis continued:

"That's what this splendid Cinq-Mars was saying to me just a few minutes ago. And, on my word, he's right! It's time that I began to think of my own affairs. Peace is assured, thank heaven! The affairs of the Kingdom are in good condition. Now that the King has performed his duties, the Christian should think of his salvation. What think you, Madame?"

"No one has longed for that moment more sincerely than I. No one is more anxious to see you at peace with the world and with God."

"You agree, then, that I must forget past offences, and pardon all—my mother, Gaston?"

"Sire, that is my opinion. But will the Cardinal approve?"

With an impatient gesture Louis replied:

"What difference? You yourself, Madame, have said that I am the master."

"You are."

"Then His Eminence must bow before my royal will!"

"And yet what if he dared resist?"

"In that case," said the King confidently, "I should have to take further steps. Are there not effective ways of controlling all one's rebel subjects, even the highest?"

The Queen could not hide a slight smile, and Louis hastened to add violently:

"Cinq-Mars, all my friends, the entire world, advise me to get rid of him. I can easily find some faithful subject to take . . ."

The King stopped suddenly, as if afraid to finish the sentence. Then, mechanically, he arose, took the Queen's hand and, pressing it to his lips with unexpected warmth, completed the sentence ambiguously:

"We must be patient, Madame. All comes to those who wait. Soon, with God's help, we shall no longer be subject to this tyranny."

At this moment an attendant entered, and, with a low bow, said:

"Your Majesty's presence is awaited for the opening of the Council."

"Very well!" answered the King peevishly. Then, turning to the Queen who was smiling happily after this unexpected interview, he said:

"Madame, you see to what intolerable tyranny I am subject. I am the King, and yet do not have an opportunity to talk to you for a quarter of an hour without being disturbed!"

Having thus vented his displeasure, the King turned abruptly and left the room, savagely cutting the air with his riding whip.

The daughter of Philip of Spain knew the vacillating character of her fickle husband too well to base any great hopes on the outcome of this interview. Yet never before had he spoken to her with such sincere affection, and never had he been so outspoken in his criticism of Richelieu. But Anne was not deceived by this change in the King. In this sudden kindness toward her and in this new stand against Richelieu, she recognized the hand of the new favorite. Alas, by experience she had come to understand Louis' inconstant affection and the sudden tempers which sometimes drove him to extremes of cruelty. She recollected the sad fate of Concini, a former favorite, who had been killed by Vitry under the King's very eyes. She wondered, trembling, whether another Vitry would not be discovered to do away with Cinq-Mars.

Yet, whatever might happen, this first step toward recon-

ciliation with her royal husband filled her with emotions both violent and complex. Richelieu had injured her in so many ways that she could not restrain a feeling of exultation at the thought of his approaching fall. At the same time, a racking fear began to terrify her. What, if finding himself at the end of his tether, Richelieu should make a final assault on her? Not being able to save himself, he might try to drag her down with him.

In short, if the Cardinal were fighting for his life, he would seize on every straw that might in any way help him, and his first step would be to accuse her of that transgression, the proof of which he was still seeking. She shivered.

"My God!" she murmured, "shall I never escape from the fear of the past! After all my prayers and humble repentance, am I to face that terrible nightmare once more! And yet, just now I felt that the King himself had at last forgotten. Why can I not also forget?"

Plunged in this profound meditation, Anne covered her face with her beautiful hands, as if to escape from a haunting memory. When she again looked up, she had a sudden fright in seeing that she was not alone, and that her despairing gesture had been witnessed by another person.

CHAPTER VII

THE HEART OF A MOTHER

The newcomer stood before the Queen in a respectful attitude. He was tall and lean, with thick, grey hair, and a stern but pleasantly frank face.

"Guitaut!" exclaimed the Queen, joyfully. "Oh, my kind Guitaut, it was you then who so frightened me."

"I hope Your Majesty will pardon me," answered the Captain of the Guards, with a stiff bow that betrayed the old soldier rather than the courtier.

"I have not seen you, Guitaut, since returning from my retreat, and thought you were not in the Palace."

"Well, in truth, I have had some difficulty in moving around. The gout has confined me to my room, which I should not have left if Comminges had not informed me of Your Majesty's return."

"Ah, you are the same brave soldier—always ready, even to the point of imprudence, to serve me when you think that my comfort is concerned. The same fearless Guitaut as of old!"

In a burst of confidence and affection, the Queen ex-

tended her hand to the loyal old soldier. To her astonishment, the Captain only answered this generous gesture by a salutation that seemed almost perfunctory. He remained stiff, and uncomfortable.

"What's happened, Guitaut?" she asked, noticing his uneasiness. "You seem afraid to speak."

"It is true, Madame. I have important news to give you but I fear that I shall embarrass you. It pains me to feel that I may disturb my royal sovereign's peace. Yet I must do my duty."

"For God's sake!" exclaimed Anne of Aūstria. "Speak, Guitaut. What has happened?"

"Do not be alarmed, Madame, the damage is not irreparable."

Then, with sudden determination, the old soldier drew from his pocket a paper which he handed to his royal mistress.

"Read this," he said.

The Queen looked at Guitaut sternly. The Captain saw her turn pale. Controlling her emotion, the Queen asked coldly:

"Who gave this to you?"

"A man whose present situation requires the greatest discretion on his part."

"Anonymous!"

"He who wrote this letter will make himself known to you alone."

"Well, so he says in the letter."

"He is a man of honor and you may depend on his word!"

"You know him then?"

The Queen looked at Guitaut sternly. The Captain lowered his eyes, and replied in embarrassment.

"I have promised not to mention his name."

Anne, crumpling the letter in her hand, murmured in vexation:

"What endless mysteries! How do you expect me to put faith in such a communication? The writer says he can not reveal his identity for several days. Why this delay?"

"Because he is at present on a mission which takes him away from Paris."

"A mission for whom?"

Guitaut's confusion increased.

"For whom?" insisted the Queen.

"For the Cardinal."

"That's what I suspected! And so, Guitaut, you have allowed yourself to be caught in this clumsy trap?"

"Madame!" he cried, protesting.

Anne interrupted him bitterly.

"This person was not even clever about it—the plot is self-evident. They wished to worry and to frighten me, and even, perhaps, entice me into some compromising meeting. Well, my poor Guitaut, Monsieur de Richelieu is wasting his time once more."

The Queen haughtily tossed the letter aside. Guitaut

hastened to pick it up, and then fell to his knees before Anne and said in a supplicating voice:

"I beg you, Madame, do not scorn this letter from a faithful servant who risks his life for you. On my honor, I hold myself as guarantee for the loyalty of the man who wrote those lines. There is no plot at all. The warning that he gives is sincere and timely. You must believe him if you value your safety."

"Not until I have seen this person, so mysteriously devoted to me."

"Alas, Madame, he has not yet returned, and fatal events may take place between now and then."

"At least tell me his name—that will be enough."

"I have sworn, on my honor as a gentleman, to remain silent."

"Very well. But what is this mission? In what affair does the Cardinal employ this man whose name even can not be pronounced?"

The Captain sighed:

"He obeys, Madame, like a soldier—as I should obey in his place. Yet his conscience rebels at being involved in a low and cowardly intrigue. It is, of course, his duty to remain silent about those secrets that have been entrusted to him, but he thinks that by a fortunate piece of luck he has come into the possession of information of great importance. Ah, Madame, when he summoned me in your name, saying that danger menaced you, I did not hesitate to go. These few words are obscure, perhaps—

he could not tell you everything as the letter might have fallen into other hands. Yet, please believe that he is sincere, and that these words come from a loyal, faithful, loving heart."

"Let me read it again," said the Queen, moved by this passionate declaration. She took the crumpled paper, and reread slowly:

" 'A man near to the Master has seized a casket containing papers and objects interesting to a certain lady. The casket comes from England, and is sealed with a star. The false bottom of the casket contained a document of great importance, which, happily, has escaped the fingers of the enemy. He who writes these words will be in Paris within two weeks, and if the lady can *see him without danger to herself*, it will be sufficient to indicate this in the following manner. When she is on her way to the chapel, on the day when she can grant the interview, she will carry a prayer-book bound in red. Her most humble and obedient servant will then make himself known.' "

During the reading, the Captain of the Guards had watched closely the changing expressions on the Queen's face. He still felt that she was uneasy and suspicious. With a single word he could remove all these doubts, but respect and pity made him hesitate to speak freely.

"Well," said Anne of Austria after a long pause, "perhaps, on your strong recommendation, I shall trust this mysterious correspondent. What danger am I threatened by, and what can I do to avoid it?"

Again deeply embarrassed, Guitaut answered slowly:

"That casket . . ."

"Yes."

"Suppose it were . . . oh, I hope Your Majesty will pardon my boldness. Suppose, Madame, that it were one that you . . ."

"Go on."

"Haven't you noticed a remarkable peculiarity about this casket?"

"What?"

"Why, like the other one, it is sealed with a star."

"Is that all? A mere coincidence!"

"Yet if perhaps it contained certain things, oh, such as trinkets and keepsakes . . . ?"

"What value do keepsakes have?"

"But suppose that there was a paper, written by the hand of a dying man."

"What do you mean? What do you know? Speak!"

Guitaut bowed his head, and whispered almost inaudibly:

"A will. The last will and testament of one now dead."

Anne trembled. Since the beginning of this interview she had tried to control her emotion, to persuade herself that there was no danger. But now a cold sweat broke out on her brow.

"Calm yourself, Madame," the soldier hastened to add. "God has not allowed this sacred document to fall into hostile hands. It is safe, and will not come to light except on a command from you."

Anne breathed more easily.

"Do you now believe me?" asked Guitaut.

"Yes, my friend, I believe you. But how has all this happened? Whence comes this new attack?"

The Captain raised his arms in a helpless gesture.

"God only knows," he said.

"Who is the man who is described as being near to the Master?"

"Monsieur de Mazarin."

"He!"

"Yes, yes, Madame. He has been trying for a long time to obtain the information contained in this casket."

"What! Do you suspect . . . ?"

"I suspect nothing, Madame. I *know* that he seeks to identify this object which he obtained in an almost miraculous way. For this, he counts on the assistance of . . ."

"Whom?"

"You, Madame!"

"What arrogant audacity!"

"Monsieur de Mazarin is not a man to hesitate at anything. Please hear me to the end. I know that this casket was brought to Paris by a certain person."

"Oh, Guitaut, speak, in heaven's name, speak quickly!"

"Two weeks ago a young man came to the Louvre. In my absence, he was received by Comminges. This man, or rather this youth, begged for an audience with me, so as to give me a mysterious trust that he had received. As

identification, he mentioned just one word, the name of a city."

"That city?"

"Amiens!"

The Queen, ashen white, murmured:

"And the trust?"

"A casket, sealed with a gold star."

"Oh, heaven help me! But you saw the messenger?"

"No, Madame. He disappeared that very evening. Since then I have waited, hoped, searched everywhere—all in vain."

In a trembling voice, Anne asked:

"His age . . . the young man's age?"

"Sixteen years old."

"Sixteen years! . . . His appearance?"

"Tall, handsome, blond . . ."

The Queen passed her icy hands over her forehead.

"No, it's not possible," she said softly. "Were he alive, I should have known."

"I must continue, Madame. During that one night the messenger disappeared and his trust fell into the hands of our adversaries."

"Was he killed? Come, admit the truth! You think he was assassinated?"

"No, I believe not," answered Guitaut slowly. "Monsieūr de Mazarin is too clever for that, and, besides, he wants to seize this person alive."

The Queen looked at her faithful servant with a puzzled, hopeful look:

"Alive? Why?"

"Because he wants a witness to testify to the origin of this casket, to identify it, and to divulge the name of the person to whom it was to be delivered. The young man, whoever he may be, alone can do this."

An expression of unutterable fear appeared on the Queen's face.

"Oh!" she cried, trembling. "That would be too terrible. Has God only spared him that he may become a witness against me, against his . . ."

She stopped, terrified.

"You see now, Madame," Guitaut began again in a low voice, "you see now why I had to speak to you, even at the risk of reopening old wounds. Above all, we must try to keep Monsieur de Mazarin from ever finding the bearer of that casket. At present the Italian holds only a silent witness, an empty, useless weapon—the casket."

These last words restored a little peace of mind to the unfortunate sovereign. At last a ray of hope penetrated the devastating darkness. After all, what could the casket by itself prove? Its pathetic trinkets and keepsakes bore no name, identified no one. They were merely mute evidence of some forgotten love.

Anne's accustomed calm and dignity shone in her face as she looked gratefully toward Guitaut. But the old

Captain still appeared careworn, and preserved his uneasy manner.

"You are right, Guitaut," she said. "I have no reason for fearing my enemies. Why are you still so depressed? Haven't you told me everything?"

The soldier seemed to hesitate.

"Speak freely. You must not omit anything."

She pronounced these words with an air of humble dignity, and the faithful Captain understood how much her royal pride must have suffered during this interview. Nevertheless, he forced himself to perform the rest of his task:

"It is true, Madame, I have not told you all."

"You mentioned a moment ago secret conspiracies, plots, hidden traps. Did you not say that with my help, they hoped to . . ."

"I did say this. Your Majesty is surrounded by spies. Your slightest movement is watched and reported. The first false step and you are irrevocably lost."

"What must I do?"

The Captain of the Guards hesitated for a moment, as if unable to carry through his disagreeable task. Finally he spoke:

"Alas, Madame, I must now perform the most difficult of my duties. But, even if I torture you, I have sworn on my honor to tell you everything. After all, even if I hurt you now, it will be a sacrifice worth while if by so doing, my Queen, I save your life—and your crown!"

Unable to speak, Anne motioned to the soldier to continue.

"This is the danger. In all likelihood the young man will try to approach you to enlist your aid in recovering his dearest and most precious possession."

"Oh, God!" groaned the Queen, breathing heavily.

The rough soldier, more affected by this mark of feminine weakness than he had been by the sight of her injured pride, remained silent, unable to continue. Yet, at any cost, he must accomplish his duty. He called to mind d'Artagnan's advice during their secret interview at Saint-Germain: "Keep an eye on Mazarin, from whom the attack will come, and at the first approach of danger warn the Queen."

Finally controlling his emotion, he continued in a trembling voice:

"Courage, Madame. The time will soon come when you will have need of all your strength."

Anne turned her frightened eyes to him in mute appeal, as if imploring him to hold out some ground for hope.

"What is it? What is taking place about me? Speak, Guitaut. Have pity on me. You are breaking my heart."

Slowly, as if performing a cruel, harsh duty, he said:

"Madame, no matter what the circumstances may be, what words are addressed to you, what prayers are uttered, remember that you must neither encourage the person who presents himself, nor, above all, recognize him."

"Oh, heaven!" gasped the heartbroken Queen.

"On the contrary you must avoid him as if he were a plague. In that lies the one chance of preserving your life, your honor!"

As the loyal old soldier uttered these words, there was a sudden noise in the corridor leading to the room. They heard steps, the rattling of swords, and the cry: "The King!" Louis, escorted by his courtiers and followed by his ministers and secretaries of state, was passing from the Council meeting. In the front rank could be seen the red robe of the Cardinal, and behind him Mazarin.

The Queen, strengthening herself by a great effort of will, watched the group pass by. She saw the King look at her furtively as he entered the room, and heard the cold voice of His Eminence repeat these words:

"Sedan threatens . . . the safety of the State . . . the enemies of the crown . . ."

She understood. Again the statesman had triumphed. The Cardinal smiled as he approached the Queen. Bowing low, he said:

"Madame, allow a faithful subject of His Majesty to present his most respectful compliments to you."

Then, straightening up, he added in a tone of suppressed irony in which was also hidden a menace:

"I trust Your Majesty had a profitable retreat at the Convent of the Carmelites."

The Queen still had enough strength to look proudly at her enemy, as he exulted in his triumph.

Mazarin, in turn, approached. Bending his lithe body very low, he murmured:

"Rash, very rash, Your Majesty!"

As he retreated, he looked stealthily back at his sovereign with the soft glance of a languishing lover.

Anne of Austria was at the end of her strength. She held herself erect, but half-closed her eyes to keep from fainting. As soon as the group of courtiers had filed out of the room, the unhappy Queen fell to her knees, on the floor, and covering her face with her slender hands, wept.

CHAPTER VIII

THE CAVALIER REAPPEARS

THE morning after the day of Guitaut's disquieting revelations to the Queen, Cyrano was awakened at an early hour by a soft knock on his door. Rising hastily, the poet opened the door, and beheld the ingratiating figure of Master Coquillart.

Since his adventure with Vauselle, Cyrano had not felt particularly well disposed toward the draper. The man's cowardly rôle in attempting to betray Vauselle to the Capuchin had not pleased Cyrano. So this morning the Gascon was about to receive the good man most ungraciously. However, Master Coquillart left the poet no time for a word, as, with a pleasant smile, he handed him a large letter, carefully sealed.

"Good news, Monsieur de Bergerac," he said, trying to win his lodger's favor. "A gentleman has just brought this letter. It's from the country."

"From the country?"

Cyrano seized the missive.

"Has my honored father finally remembered his beloved son?" he thought. "In the nick of time!"

Shutting the door vigorously on the draper's inquisitive face, he quickly broke the seals of the document. The letter was, in fact, from Monsieur de Bergerac, his father. That worthy gentleman had many wise thoughts to communicate to his son: "Paris is a dangerous ocean, with high waves that may wreck the boat of the rash mariner, so be always on your guard, my son." After reading several pages of such highly commendable advice, Cyrano's face began to assume an expression of disappointment. He had been hoping for something else.

Fortunately, the postscript brought back the smile to the poet's lips. It was only one sentence, informing him that if he would call at the office of Monsieur Corbin, the family notary, he would find waiting for him a quarter of his year's allowance.

"*Sandious!*" exclaimed Cyrano, exultingly. "I had not dared to hope for such generosity from my illustrious sire. Well, they say fortune comes to those who sleep!"

The poet hastened to dress so as to lose no time in keeping this appointment so providentially offered him with Monsieur Corbin. We must not think that our Gascon was greedy or mercenary. On the contrary, no one had a more complete scorn for money than Cyrano—when his pocketbook was well filled. But we should remember that his guest, the Sieur de Vauselle, had absconded with all that he possessed. For two weeks Cyrano had been living on his credit. His meals were taken at the modest restaurant on the Rue Saint-Martin, and during the greater part of

the day he remained in his room. His only amusement was to take *Capitan* out on short rides. The noble horse, who seemed doomed to be passed from one impoverished master to another, had been thriving in the stable of *The White Sheep.*

To appreciate fully Cyrano's sad plight during this fortnight, we must remember that he had two important and delicate affairs on his hands, both involving financial responsibilities. First, there was the Cavalier. From Vaüselle's remarks he realized that his friend was engaged in a dangerous undertaking. He had enlisted Saint-Amant's help in trying to find some trace of the young soldier, but the Cavalier's movements were wrapped in such secrecy that all their investigations had proved fruitless.

The poet's second preoccupation, alas, was the furtherance of his suit with the charming Mademoiselle Minou. With Vauselle keeping discreetly in the background, the Gascon had the field to himself. Although the pretty little actress had shown him every mark of encouragement, Cyrano had not dared to press his suit during these two weeks. His lack of money kept him from making her the slightest present, and he could not afford to share the simplest meal with her. The somewhat ridiculous rôle of the passive lover had been extremely difficult for the brave Gascon.

The smile was still on Cyrano's face when he had finished dressing. At last, and in the moment of deepest despair, the tide had turned! Providence had come to his

rescue! His first thought was of Mademoiselle Minou. He seized a sheet of paper, and in a vein of what might be called ardent burlesque penned a sonnet to his fair, the chief burden of which was an invitation to dine that evening at *The Pewter Plate.*

"There!" sighed the Gascon, "there is something precise and clear about that that I like. If she does not capitulate before that, then there is no hope for poetry, and I shall turn Carmelite."

In order to ensure the safe and speedy arrival of his missive he took the direct method of throwing it accurately across the little court into the window of his lovely neighbor. With no further delay, he hastened to the office of the family lawyer.

When Cyrano left the house of Maître Corbin, his pockets were well filled, and his heart felt as light as his purse was heavy. The poet walked cheerfully toward the Palais, which faced the notary's office. At this period, the galleries of the Palais were the great rendez-vous for the gallants. There, in the numerous little shops that nestled about the pillars of the famous law court, one could purchase almost anything. But there, above all, were sold those thousand and one little elegancies in which the ingenuity of Paris has always excelled.

Usually Cyrano would have entered the Palais with the greatest disdain imaginable. What scorn he had had for those dandies in Spanish dress all decked out in ribbons, who strutted up and down the great arcade, occasionally

peering at some pretty beauty of the day as she walked by, her face covered by an Italian mask. How sarcastic he had waxed over the killing looks that these fashionable sprigs exchanged with one another. Cyrano usually came here only to examine the delicately decorated scabbards, or the supple Damascene blades, masterpieces of the skill of Florence and of Toledo. Or perhaps the poet would finger the pages of a book of poems, fresh from the press.

But, alas, Cyrano was in love, and a new soul had taken possession of his Gascon body. On this morning he eyed the fashionable crowd with pleasure, and began to long for a thousand of those little trinkets of whose very existence he had scarcely known before. Blushing and excited like a young boy who has run away from school, the amorous poet passed from booth to booth, purchasing perfumes, ointments, lace, ribbons, and countless odds and ends which were indispensable to a fashionable toilet. He was soon staggering under a load of equipment that would have sufficed to decorate an entire company of Carbon de Castel-Jaloux guards.

The sight of a pretty little flower booth inspired his romantic heart. With great deliberation he selected the prettiest buds and had them made into a tempting bouquet. He sent a messenger to deliver these flowers to Mademoiselle Minou at the Rue Grénetail.

Having performed this important duty, the Gascon took a last look around the booths. Had he forgotten anything? No! Then he could return home. He took

three steps forward—and suddenly stopped short, his body tense.

"The devil take me!" he gasped in amazement. "What a lucky chance!"

This exclamation was caused by the sight of a gentleman at the other end of the gallery, leaning calmly against a pillar, apparently waiting for some one. Cyrano recognized him as his adversary of the Carmelites. There could be no mistake—it was the Musketeer. That imperturbable calmness could belong to but one man alone! There he was, ten steps away. In the midst of this bustling, fashionable crowd, his former opponent stood as impassive as he had that night when he remained motionless in the little street near the convent of the Carmelites.

"Ah!" reflected Cyrano. "What an excellent opportunity to make a few enquiries about the Cavalier. This gentleman, who seems to be acquainted with the secrets of the great, should have some news for me."

He had started toward the Musketeer, when a sudden thought stopped him:

"Perhaps he will give me no very cordial welcome. We left each other that night not in the best of tempers. Ah, well, if he is ungracious to me, I'll have an opportunity to renew our former relations. *Mordious*, personally, I should be delighted to test his sword when it is not in its scabbard!"

Smiling pleasantly at this thought, the poet again stepped forward. Only a few lawyers, walking with deliberate

step separated him from the Musketeer. He was about to speak to him when he was suddenly pushed aside by a stranger who rushed up quickly to the lieutenant of the Musketeers. The newcomer was carefully cloaked and masked. Between the top of his collar and the brim of his hat, Cyrano could only distinguish the line of the mouth, bright red lips, and a thin moustache, curled in the Italian fashion. Cyrano, greatly annoyed, stepped back into the shadow of a pillar, determined to speak to the Musketeer as soon as this stranger left.

Hardly a minute had passed when a third person appeared from one of the side galleries, and joined the little group. This man seemed out of breath, as if he had been walking rapidly. After saluting respectfully, he began a long explanation, accompanied by a series of lively gestures. In his place of concealment, Cyrano suddenly opened wide his eyes.

"Word of a Bergerac!" he exclaimed. "Am I going blind? Or is this a nightmare? It's getting a bit thick!"

There was, indeed, good reason for his astonishment. He had suddenly recognized the panting, gesticulating newcomer. There could be no doubt! It was the Sieur de Vauselle, the one and only Vauselle! Yet this was a changed, almost unrecognizable Vauselle. Clothed in an elegant new suit, the man made such a splendid appearance that the Gascon hesitated to mutter to himself the one word he always applied to Vauselle—"scoundrel!" Overwhelmed, Cyrano exclaimed to himself:

"The devil! My Musketeer of the Carmelites and my messenger from Sedan, together—plus this other gentleman who is so careful to conceal his dainty face! Zounds! What does it all mean?"

He had no time to continue these reflections. On a motion from Vauselle, the masked gentleman approached the colonnade which separated the gallery from the great hall of the Palais. From that place the two men could watch this room without being observed. Cyrano saw the men bend toward each other and exchange several words in a low voice.

Vauselle, whose face had assumed a sudden expression of triumph, pointed toward the hall. His companion looked fixedly for a moment, and slowly a smile appeared on his face. He turned around suddenly, and called in a soft voice, with a strong trace of foreign accent:

"Monsieur d'Artagnan!"

The Musketeer had remained standing against the pillar during the entire scene. He seemed to have no interest in this mysterious meeting. When he was finally called, he advanced with marked reluctance. The two men pointed excitedly toward that which aroused their intense curiosity. Cyrano did not miss a movement, a gesture. He thought he saw the Musketeer shiver slightly as he looked into the next room; a scowl passed over his calm face.

The whole situation was becoming sinister. What could

there be in the next room to arouse such violent and contradictory emotions in the three men? Cyrano could no longer restrain his curiosity. He slipped quietly forward to a vantage point from which he also could look into the hall and still remain concealed. At first he had difficulty in distinguishing anything in the darkness. Slowly his eyes became accustomed to the gloom, and he saw . . . ! He could scarcely restrain a startled cry.

Two paces from him, separated only by a low glass partition, two young people were talking together. They conversed peacefully, alone in the shadow and silence of the great hall. Their youthful figures stood out graceful and charming against the background of tall pillars and marble walls. One of these persons was a handsome young man whose eyes sparkled with the fire of youth; the other was a lovely girl, whose eyes answered his with a soft, penetrating glow. Never was there a more charming picture. Yet these young people, the sight of whom should have inspired confidence and pleasure, were the objects of interest to two sinister spies, the cowardly Vauselle and his mysterious companion. They were watched as if they were a valued prize that at last was about to be seized.

Cyrano's blood boiled in his veins. His first desire was to cry "Be careful," and then to rush at these spies with drawn sword. He felt that he must try to dispel this hideous nightmare.

"They! *Mordious!* It is they!" stammered the poet,

in an access of surprise and fury. He had easily recognized the lovely Claire de Cernay, and his young friend, the Mysterious Cavalier.

With a sudden, impetuous movement, the poet started forward, pushing roughly aside those who came in his way. But he had not quite reached the door of the great hall when he felt himself stopped by an irresistible force. A hand had seized him from behind in a grasp that held him motionless. Blind with anger, Cyrano turned around and found himself face to face with his *bête-noire*, with the man whom he considered his mortal enemy—d'Artagnan.

"*Vivadious!*" he cried in a threatening voice.

Preserving his usual calm, the Musketeer paid no attention to this unpleasant greeting. He spoke quietly to the poet as if he had never seen him before:

"Be careful! You advance like a man looking for death!"

Were these ambiguous words a warning, or a new mockery? Cyrano hesitated a moment. A strange light glowed in his adversary's eyes, and the hands that held his collar trembled slightly. D'Artagnan seemed to be warning him of the presence of the other two men, who, still plunged in contemplation of their fascinating object, had not noticed this meeting.

But Cyrano, carried away by the warmth of his passion, quickly broke loose from the restraining grasp, and started forward. A great crowd of people coming through

the door pushed him back. The large hall, deserted a few moments before, was now filled with a long procession of people. In front was a mixed crowd of lawyers, advocates, petitioners, witnesses, and spectators. Through this noisy group a sergeant-at-arms made passage for a body of men dressed in ermine-lined robes and square hats. Before this majestic procession walked mace-bearers, and behind them a small army of clerks and assistants. The Counsellors of the Great Chamber, led by the President, were returning solemnly from a sitting.

Cursing his bad luck, Cyrano had to wait for this interminable procession to file by before he himself could enter the hall. As soon as the last group of magistrates had passed, he forced a passage through the crowd of petty lawyers that followed slowly, still discussing some case of the day. He first glanced toward the hiding-place of the three men. D'Artagnan, Vauselle, and their companion had disappeared! Well, no matter! The important thing was to meet the Cavalier and his fair friend, and to warn them of their danger. He rushed into the hall, and looked around. Deserted. Not a person to be seen.

The excited Gascon ran up and down the various galleries, searching for the young couple. He raced along winding corridors, climbed and descended stairs, pushed people to the right and left in this mad chase. Nowhere could his friends be found. All the actors in this extraordinary scene seemed to have vanished like phantoms into

thin air. The impetuous Cyrano refused to give up the search, and left the Palais by the exit facing the Place Dauphine.

Unfortunately, the two for whom he was looking had left the building by the Cour de Mai. Disturbed in their conversation by the endless procession from the great hall, the couple had taken the Rue de la Barillerie and walked toward the Pont au Change. They spoke scarcely a word, but their silence was more eloquent than words. Now and then the Cavalier looked tenderly at the lovely girl whom he now saw once more after a two weeks' absence. He walked proudly, as if realizing his position as her champion and protector. Claire held her head high, fearing to show the agitation she felt.

When they reached the bridge, she made an effort to break through this overwhelming silence. She commenced the conversation again where they had left off, and said in a trembling voice:

"The Queen hesitated a long time before granting the audience I asked for you."

"Yet she promised it to me when I was about to leave for Sedan."

"Her Majesty has not forgotten. She knows full well how indebted she is to you, but the poor Queen is not mistress of her own life. Her slightest movement is watched; every remark she makes is overheard. Ah, if you only knew what a wretched life she leads, and to what an odious system of spying she is subjected!"

The young man looked at her, shaking with indignation.

"Who dares persecute Her Majesty?"

"Who? All, alas! From the Cardinal to the least of his servants—down to that insinuating Monsieur Mazarin who, sprung from nowhere, dogs the Queen's steps with terrifying audacity and tenacity. He, above all, is to be feared."

She felt her companion seize her hand, and press it lightly, as if to reassure her. She thanked him with a smile.

"Let us leave all that," she said. "The important thing is that I have succeeded. You will see her this evening."

"Thank you," cried Tancrède, warmly. "Thank you a thousand times! You have no idea how important this audience is to me. It means my fortune, my happiness, nay, my life!"

Claire turned her pretty eyes to the Cavalier in sūrprise. The youth continued passionately:

"When I left on that adventure, I knew that I was risking my life. But I did not hesitate, because you had asked me. And yet that sudden departure almost broke my heart. It separated me for a long time, perhaps for ever, from that which I hold dearer than my life."

A slight trembling was Claire's only answer to this fiery declaration. Tancrède continued:

"The danger? What mattered it! A soldier is always ready to sacrifice his life. But the terrible thought haunted me—that I might be seized or killed on this jour-

ney and disappear without ever again seeing her for whom I was ready to die. Oh, how I wanted just one minūte to tell her what immortal memories of her charm, her bravery, her beauty, I would take with me to the next world!"

"Luckily, Cavalier, you have returned safely!"

With a shake of the head, he said:

"I have, in fact, returned, but, alas, I cannot yet share with you that secret which is my one hope and comfort, which thrills and overwhelms me. No, I must still keep it buried deep within my heart. The hour has not yet arrived when I can proudly announce it in the face of the world."

She looked at him questioningly.

"For the time being, I am only a poor soldier of fortune, an adventurer without home, even without name—the Mysterious Cavalier!"

"Is that not enough? What woman in the world would refuse the homage of a noble loyal heart like yours?"

"You are kind, Mademoiselle, and I thank you. But this heart whose worth you exaggerate is too proud to accept pity. Even if I have to suffer more cruelly than before, even if I break my heart in silence, I shall never reveal this secret until I may do so without shame!"

Noble young Cavalier! That sentiment does honor to yoūr loyalty. Yet perhaps your secret is already coming to light. Perhaps the heart of a young girl has even now divined the truth!

"You are right," Claire said with quiet approval.

Then, with sudden emotion, she added:

"Didn't you tell me that you had no family?"

"Yes."

"I, too, am an orphan. You can confide your sorrows to me."

"To what purpose?"

"I am ready to help you, to comfort you."

"No, Mademoiselle, what I wish to share with you are my hopes and my joys. You are always my messenger of good omen."

"Oh, Cavalier!"

"You would do wrong to deny it. I first met you when a sudden stroke of fate had cruelly snatched from me my one hope for the future. Then I saw you—from a distance, it is true—yet at once I had new hope. I felt that divine Providence would not allow me to be crushed. I also had a peculiar presentiment that this same Providence had placed you in my path to help and to encourage me."

"Really!" exclaimed the girl, not trying to conceal her pleasure. "Yet that surprises me. I myself am so helpless, and have such need of assistance in my own affairs."

"But aren't you the *Angel?*" he said, looking at her significantly.

"Nonsense!"

"And don't you live near the *Goddess?*"

"Poor, poor Goddess! Sad sovereign of a deserted

Olympus. Her closest friends can expect but little help from her!"

Claire pronounced these words deliberately, as if to remove from her companion's mind any hopes that would only lead to a cruel disillusionment. Tancrède made a sign of protest.

"You misunderstand me," he said. "I shall not ask for any favor. I did not sell my services to her—and, besides, I have already been sufficiently recompensed by seeing you. No, I have served her and shall continue to serve her, without asking for reward. And yet, I have an extraordinary conviction that she can do everything for me."

He continued with animation, though wisely keeping his voice low:

"The Queen can elevate or humble me. She can let me remain the poor soldier of fortune, or can make me a great nobleman!"

Breathing quickly, Claire asked:

"What do you mean, Cavalier?"

"Listen! A secret, some mystery of birth, hangs over me. For a moment I held the key to the enigma. I thought that I would soon know what name I was to bear. At last I would find out by what treachery I had been despoiled, and would discover the names of the persons who had made of my youth a tortured misery. My fortune was to be restored to me, and, sword in hand, I would punish the wretches who had enriched themselves

by ruining an orphan. Alas, this key which was to open up the world for me was stolen."

"Continue, please," said the young girl, now infected with the Cavalier's enthusiasm.

"Yesterday I did not know who the thieves were. Today, I do. My only clue was that they were also the enemies of a certain mythical being, of a phantom, whose name alone I knew—Monsieur Bernard."

"The Duchess!"

"Madame de Chevreuse! Through her I have found . . ."

"Be quiet!" she exclaimed, looking about with a frightened glance.

In a low voice, he continued:

"I know now who your persecutors are. I know what men menace, torture, spy on our noble mistress, the Queen of France."

Claire shivered, and then murmured.

"Alas, they are powerful while we are weak! They are armed while we can protect ourselves by prayer alone!"

"I ask you no questions. Alone I shall fight this battle for my life and for my honor! Yet, though I shall not seek for any aid from Her Majesty, there is one favor which she cannot refuse. She knows the secret of my birth!"

"She! The Queen?"

"Yes, I am sure of it! I was to deliver the precious trust which contained my secret to Monsieur de Guitaut, the Queen's loyal servant. She can help me to penetrate

this mystery. She alone can unravel it for me! That is why I have asked for an audience. I shall present myself before the Queen this evening and say: 'In return for the offer of my life, I ask Your Majesty for one word, one name: the name of my father!' "

"Oh!" cried Claire. "If she knows it, she will be sure to tell you. She is so just, so kind!"

"Then I am saved! The darkness will soon disappear. And then, then at last, I can speak to you that word which fills my heart, which comes to my lips in spite of all my efforts, but which now I can only murmur to myself."

Tancrède pronounced to himself that magic word. His young friend, however, seemed to guess what it was, for her heart opened to receive it, while a blush spread over her lovely face.

"Farewell!" she exclaimed, still confused, and not daring to remain longer. "This evening, at nine o'clock . . . the Louvre . . . at the gate to the gardens."

"Rest assured, I shall not forget."

"Remember, above all, what you promised. Do not see a single soul before tonight."

"I have sworn! Not a soul! And yet, Mademoiselle, I have a friend, the most loyal, trustworthy person in the world. I answer for him as I would for myself."

"His name?"

"Cyrano!"

Claire de Cernay smiled.

"Oh, yes, you may see Monsieur de Bergerac."

The beautiful girl soon disappeared in the direction of the Loūvre. Tancrède threw a passionate kiss after the retreating Claire and followed her with his eyes until she disappeared from view. He then lost himself in the tortuous labyrinth of the difficulties that beset him.

CHAPTER IX

MAZARIN MAKES PLANS

At the same moment that Cyrano left the Palais by the Place Dauphine and that the young couple left by the Rue de la Barillerie, a little group of three quitted the same building by a back door. Reaching the bank of the river, they quickly walked down the Quai des Orfèvres. This group was composed of the three men whom we have seen spying, from the gallery, upon the Cavalier and Claire: the mysterious gentleman wrapped in his cloak, the Sieur de Vauselle, and their escort, Lieutenant d'Artagnan.

They soon reached a strange-looking little house, old and disreputable in appearance. Behind it rose two huge towers whose height made the house, by contrast, seem all the more insignificant. The towers belonged to the residence of the first President of the Parliament of Paris. The low, squat house in front of it seemed to have been overlooked by the house-wreckers when they cleared the ground for the presidential mansion. It rested humbly in the shadow of its magnificent neighbor. The barred windows and massive door gave this little house something of the questionable and sinister appearance of a jail.

It was here that the masked gentleman, followed by his

two companions, entered. In a low room, stuffy with the fumes of tobacco, a number of men were seated on wooden benches along the walls. As soon as the mysterious gentleman entered, the men arose with a clashing of steel, and one of them advanced respectfully, hat in hand.

"Ah, it's you, Rūvigny," remarked the masked newcomer. "Your men are all there?"

"All, Monseigneur, and ready to lay down their lives in the glorious service of Your Excellency."

"Very good, that will do," interrupted the other with authority, looking furtively at d'Artagnan. "I shall give you your orders later. Come, Monsieur de Vauselle."

Taking off his cloak, Monsieur de Mazarin—for it was evidently he—began to mount the rickety stairway. Vauselle, proud of the favor shown him, strutted conceitedly after his new master.

"There's a fine acqūisition!" grumbled Ruvigny, looking suspiciously at the retreating Vauselle. "Will some one kindly tell me why Monsieur de Mazarin saved that man from the clutches of the Cardinal and his Capuchins when the rascal deserved to be hanged?"

"Perhaps to add a masterpiece to his priceless collection," remarked a mocking voice.

The leader of the soldiers, stung by this taunt, turned around sharply to discover the speaker. But he withheld the remark that trembled on his lips when he saw before him the smiling d'Artagnan, whom Mazarin in his excitement had left behind.

"*Sangodemi!*" exclaimed Ruvigny, trying to appear calm in the face of his former adversary. "If it isn't our old friend M. d'Artagnan!"

"Himself! And delighted to find the noble Ruvigny in such fine health!"

The two had not met since the little episode in *The Royal Oak* at Saint-Germain, when Ruvigny's conduct had not been particularly gallant. The trooper winced slightly under the calm look of the Musketeer.

"So you're back again?" he stammered.

"As you can see for yourself."

"And you had a good trip?"

"Perfect, although a little fatiguing."

"Well, I must say that at Saint-Germain you seemed to be a little . . . ah, a little tired."

"Oh," answered d'Artagnan maliciously, "when one is too tired, one sleeps, that's all!"

A voice calling from upstairs ended this conversation, which was beginning to embarrass Ruvigny.

"A thousand pardons," he said. "Monseigneur is calling me."

"Go, my dear fellow, I should hate to deprive Monsieur de Mazarin of a second of your amiable company—and of your efficient service."

The soldier quickly climbed the stairs, a little disturbed by this meeting with d'Artagnan. He growled between his teeth:

"Why the devil does Mazarin bring this man into

our affair? If he's to be one of us, he'll spoil everything."

After thus venting his wrath, he entered Mazarin's study. He bowed humbly, and an obsequious smile rested on his lips. Mazarin did not notice him at first. He was absorbed in a conversation with his new favorite, and rubbed his hands happily, as he murmured:

"There's no reason now to delay or to hesitate. The fruit is ripe; we must pluck it!"

"I have kept all the promises I made to Your Excellency!" remarked Vauselle triumphantly.

"You are right, and I shall not forget it, either."

"In return for my pardon, I promised to deliver to you the man of Sedan, the Duchess' messenger. . . ."

"Which you have faithfully done."

"I followed him step by step all the way from Sedan to Paris. I had all the letters intercepted that he sent each day to the young girl at the Hôtel de Nevers, and sent copies of them to you."

"I realize all that."

"Not a single movement of his escaped me. I led him, still unsuspecting, into your very hands. I have just pointed him out to you in the company of one of the maids of honor."

"His accomplice."

Vauselle drew nearer and said in a low voice:

"She who this evening expects to lead him into the presence of Her Majesty, the Queen."

Mazarin quickly put a finger to his lips.

"Softly, softly, Monsieur de Vauselle! Have a proper respect for Her Majesty. Remember, it is forbidden that the Queen be suspected of anything."

The Sieur de Vauselle looked at his master in astonishment. The Italian hastened to add:

"The young man is a messenger from Sedan. Nothing else! Remember, nothing else!"

In pronouncing these words, which carried a hidden meaning, Mazarin looked around to make sure that his remark was not overheard.

"Where in the world is Ruvigny?" he exclaimed impatiently.

"Here, Your Excellency," answered the trooper, quickly emerging from his corner.

The Italian looked at him a moment, and then said dryly:

"The matter is decided. It is to be done tonight."

Ruvigny acknowledged this remark with a low bow.

"At what time?" he asked.

"Be in the Queen's gardens by eight o'clock. They might arrive early, although the appointment is for nine."

"How many swords?"

"Ten or twelve will suffice. You are only concerned with one man and a woman."

"Or, rather, two children," corrected Vauselle, baring his great wolf-like teeth.

The trooper made a slight face.

"I should have preferred adversaries more worthy of our swords. We could then prove more completely the depth of our devotion to Your Grace."

Vauselle, in a slightly ironic tone of voice, replied:

"Don't worry too much, Monsieur de Ruvigny. Young as he is, the Cavalier knows how to defend himself. I have seen him at close quarters. He can fight like an enraged lion cub."

"We shall be four times stronger than necessary," remarked Ruvigny scornfully.

Mazarin suddenly interrupted this dialogue.

"Remember, Ruvigny, that above all you must take him alive!"

"Oh, it's a rather delicate affair, then?"

"The life of this young man is of tremendous importance to me—you understand?"

"Yes, Monseigneur. Tonight, at eight o'clock, in the Queen's gardens."

"You are to open the gate at the first sign of this person."

"And we are then to seize him."

"Alive, Ruvigny, alive!"

Then, in a low voice, he muttered:

"If they should kill him, all my trouble would have been in vain. I should once more have only the empty casket."

The Italian, accompanied by his two satellites, descended

the stairs. Mazarin looked at the patient d'Artagnan in surprise, having apparently forgotten about the Musketeer in the midst of so many distractions.

"What!" he exclaimed, hypocritically. "Have I made dear Monsieur d'Artagnan wait here. You are now free to do what you like."

"His Eminence, Cardinal Richelieu, ordered me to accompany you," answered d'Artagnan without moving.

"Your duty for today is over. Later you will report to Monseigneur de Richelieu and tell him what you have just seen at the Palais."

D'Artagnan looked steadily at the speaker, his face assuming an expression of complete surprise.

"What I have seen? Why, merely two young people talking to each other—of love, presumably! I cannot believe that this would be of particular interest to His Eminence."

Mazarin impatiently tapped the ground with his foot.

"Oh, nonsense! You understand me perfectly! You must have recognized these so-called lovers?"

D'Artagnan shrugged his shoulders, as if having no interest in the matter. The irritated Italian hastened to be more explicit.

"You know that the young lady is one of the Queen's maids of honor, Mademoiselle de Cernay. And surely you must remember having seen the young man one night at the Convent of the Carmelites—in the company of another person."

"Ah, yes, it's quite possible!"

"Then you realize that they were talking of something beside love?"

"You were in a better position to know than I," replied the Musketeer imperturbably.

"Well, you can rest assured that Monsieur de Richelieu himself will soon be able to verify all this. Tonight the messenger of the Duchess will be ours!"

In spite of his calm manner, d'Artagnan could not conceal a sudden nervous twitch of his body. He quickly controlled himself.

"I almost forgot to tell you," he said, looking carefully at Mazarin out of the corner of his eye, "that I am to be on guard tonight at the Louvre with my company of Musketeers."

"*Diavolo!*"

"Yes, I have been ordered to watch over the safety of Her Majesty, the Queen. So if you need me, you will know where I can be found."

Then, satisfied with the effect his words had produced, he turned on his heel and departed, whistling between his teeth a hunting air.

"The devil!" exclaimed Mazarin, making a wry face. "One would swear that that man had guessed all our plans."

But a quick look at Ruvigny's men reassured him.

"Monsieur de Ruvigny, take twenty men with you. It may be a warmer evening than I suspected!"

CHAPTER X

LINIÈRES' REPENTANCE

AMAZED by what he had so unexpectedly witnessed, Cyrano, leaving the Palais, hastened to return to the Rue Grénetail. A faint ray of hope had entered the darkness which completely enveloped his spirit. Since the Cavalier was again in Paris, he had probably rushed to Cyrano's lodgings to greet his sworn friend.

This thought became almost a conviction in the poet's mind as he hastened along the Rue Saint-Martin. He expected every moment to see in front of him the figure of Tancrède. It was with the keenest disappointment that he learned that no one had appeared at *The White Sheep* during his absence.

In spite of the Gascon's ominous threats, Master Coquillart solemnly swore that no human being had come to the lodgings all that day. Not one! Except for a messenger with a magnificent bouquet of flowers. But the flowers, alas, were not addressed to Monsieur de Bergerac.

"Ah, my flowers!" thought Cyrano.

This reminded him of the fair Mademoiselle Minoū, and

of the invitation he had extended to her for dinner that night.

"Take these!" he said to the draper, unloading his purchases into the arms of the astonished man. Without another word he started toward the Rue Saint-Martin.

At this period the first thing to greet the eyes of a traveller who entered Paris by the Porte Saint-Martin was the sight of a quaint old inn, called *The Pewter Plate*. It was toward this famous tavern that Cyrano hastened. The pompous host met the friend of the illustrious Saint-Amant with all the honor due such a person. The poet ordered a dinner for eleven o'clock, after the theatre. He insisted that no pains be spared on the meal, and that no thought be given to expense. The host assured him that the dinner would be worthy of the reputation of the house and of the quality of the distinguished guests.

Cyrano, having discharged this important duty, returned to his lodgings. As soon as he had entered his room, he relieved his impatience by opening the parcels and beginning a very meticulous toilet. A sudden knock on the door made him jump.

"Who's there?" he cried, stopping short, with a brush in one hand and a curling iron in the other. His first thought was that Mademoiselle Minou had come to acknowledge his invitation; his second was that the Cavalier was making a tardy appearance.

"He . . . or she?" he asked himself, undecided.

There was another, louder knock. He hastened to open

the door. The sight of the figure before him drew from him a cry of disappointment. It was neither the graceful figure of the Cavalier nor that of the lovely actress. A voluminous body completely filled the door-way. The visitor, sweating and puffing, demanded in a stentorian voice:

"May I enter?"

It was a superfluous question, for, without awaiting an answer, the huge Saint-Amant had opened a passage into the room by the mere force of his imposing bulk.

"You!" cried the disconcerted Cyrano.

The giant burst into a loud laugh.

"The devil! What a warm welcome! It's pleasant to find our excellent friend so anxious to receive us after . . ."

"Eight long days," completed a small, shrill voice that seemed to spring up from the shadow of the landing. The possessor of this voice then made his appearance. The meagre form of the newcomer seemed to be swallowed up by the vast bulk of Saint-Amant.

"You, also!" exclaimed Cyrano, recognizing Linières.

"*Tu quoque, Brutus!*" murmured the little man, echoing his host's exclamation.

The astonished poet remained motionless for several moments in front of his unexpected visitors, the brush still in one hand, the curling iron in the other.

"We ourselves!" explained Saint-Amant with dignity. "Tired of waiting for you to make an appearance at *The*

Pineapple we ventured to search for our rare bird in his own nest."

"*Rara avis!*" added Linières, still playing the rôle of echo— a Latin echo.

"As you didn't come to the mountain . . ."

"The mountain came to you," completed the little man, pointing, perhaps involuntarily, to his corpulent friend.

Cyrano did not speak a word. He had neglected his friends during his moneyless days, and now awaited a torrent of reproaches. His comrades had chosen a singularly inappropriate moment for their visit. The recent events at the Palais had left him in no mood for pleasantries. As minute after minute passed by, his anxiety for the Cavalier became proportionately greater. And so, with somewhat poor grace, the poet prepared to continued his interrupted toilet. Turning his back on his guests, he asked:

"Well, what lucky chance brings you here?"

There was no answer. He turned quickly aroūnd to discover his friends rapidly exchanging glances.

"*Mordious!* What's the meaning of these mysterious glances?"

"Hush!" replied Saint-Amant, looking around the room with a searching glance. "Are you alone here?"

"Why, *Sandious*, are you blind?"

"Shh, fool! Can any one hear us?"

"Zounds! What's wrong with you?"

This time both men answered together:

"Shh!"

Then, in a low voice, they spoke these enigmatic words:

"There is news!"

"News? About what?"

The answer did not come at once, because the badly winded giant proceeded to throw his great body upon the cot, the springs of which groaned under this unaccustomed burden. Linières, profiting by this pause, climbed upon the top of the stand, where he settled like a parrot on its perch.

"Tell me what's happened?" asked the poet, vaguely alarmed.

Saint-Amant shook his head gravely, and his companion uttered a significant sigh.

"You said you had news?"

"Serious!" announced Saint-Amant.

"Most serious!" corroborated the parrot from his perch.

"About what?"

"What?" exclaimed the big man in a tone of reproach. "Savinien, my son, you don't mean to tell me that you have forgotten?"

"Forgotten what?"

The giant looked at Linières in amazement.

"Alas, our friend has lost his memory!"

"He has drunk of the waters of Lethe!" agreed the echo.

"Didn't you beg us . . ."

"In an insistent manner . . ."

"To find out about a friend . . ."

"A handsome young man . . ."

"Who had disappeared mysteriously . . ."

"And suddenly . . ."

"And whom you had reason to consider threatened . . ."

"By a terrible danger?"

This amazing dialogue almost overwhelmed the poor poet, who asked anxiously:

"Are you speaking of the Cavalier?"

"And who in the devil did you think it was!"

Cyrano, completely forgetful of his toilet, dropped the curling iron.

"You have news of him? Have you seen him? Do you know anything of him? Speak, Beelzebub!"

"Hold on! Give us a moment's rest! We must catch our breath."

The restless eye of Saint-Amant, looking around the room, suddenly stopped at the sight of their host's table, cluttered with pots, jars, vials, boxes. He looked quizzically at the poet.

"Nothing!" remarked the embarrassed Cyrano. "I was just getting dressed when you arrived."

"He was getting dressed—that's all!" exclaimed Saint-Amant maliciously. "Why, the very devil! What an aroma, what perfumes! Don't you notice something peculiar in the breeze, Linières?"

The little man sniffed.

"Heaven help me! It must be some lady's boudoir!"

With twinkling eyes, the jovial gourmand pointed to the table:

"Just look at it! Creams, salves, powder-puffs! What daintiness! Linières, are we in the right room?"

"It's the dressing-table of Psyche herself!"

"Oh, what a stupid mistake we have made! Come, Linières, we must leave at once. This pretty gentleman can't be our honest friend Bergerac."

"Shh! It's Adonis revisiting the earth. I wonder can Venus be hiding under the bed?"

Cyrano, infuriated, interrupted this dialogue:

"Zounds! Haven't you had enough amusement for the day? Come, we have an important matter on hand."

The two wags suddenly resumed their grave manner. Saint-Amant was the first to speak:

"Do *you* have any news about the Cavalier?"

"He has been in Paris since this morning!"

"In Paris since this morning?" gasped the astonished giant.

"I am sure of it. I have seen him!"

"Has he been here?"

"No, but I met him accidentally outside."

"Where?"

"In the gallery of the Palais!"

"Oh, a thousand devils! We're too late!"

With a moan of misery, the great man collapsed upon the bed.

"*Tarde venientibus!*" sighed the echo.

Both men remained silent and motionless, as if this news had suddenly turned them to stone.

"Too late, you say! Why, what's happened?"

"God only knows! But it's safe to guess that it's nothing pleasant. One thing is certain: the Cavalier has fallen into a trap. It is now too late to warn him that all his movements are known, that he is dogged at every step. If only he had known that the meeting at the Palais was a trap!"

The poet, now thoroughly alarmed, started to pace the room feverishly:

"*Sandious!* I suspected that. Listen now; I saw this rash young friend of ours, but did not speak to him. He was not alone."

"Did a young girl accompany him?"

"Yes, one of the Queen's attendants."

"Mademoiselle de Cernay!"

"But that's not all. A few feet away spies were concealed in the shadow, watching every motion, hearing every word."

Saint-Amant sighed:

"The poor children!"

"As I was about to warn them of the danger, they disappeared."

"Did you recognize the spies?"

Cyrano hesitated. He did not feel in the mood for talking of either Vauselle or d'Artagnan, whose names inspired such unpleasant memories.

"No," he replied. "They didn't seem to be people of importance—except perhaps for one man, who carefully concealed his face."

"A masked man? Didn't you at least see enough of him to give us some idea of his appearance?"

"No, nothing!"

"Always nothing! Oh, that man knows how to keep under cover."

Saint-Amant remained silent a moment, as if collecting his thoughts. Cyrano, bursting with impatience, spoke rapidly:

"Now, my friends, I have told you everything! It is your turn to speak, and to throw some light on this baffling mystery."

"You are right, my son. You shall have all the information in our possession, and the three of us can then attempt the miracle of saving these two innocent children."

There was another short silence as Saint-Amant with great deliberation made ready to speak. From his elevated position Linières looked anxiously at Cyrano, who continued his feverish pacing of the room. Finally Saint-Amant cleared his throat:

"The more I think it over," he said, "the more I feel that all is not lost. For a moment I feared that the Cavalier must have remained in the Palais."

"I know he didn't!" exclaimed Cyrano, anxious to grasp at the least straw. "I searched the place from top to bottom. He was nowhere in the building."

Saint-Amant calmed him:

"Savinien, my son, the mysterious man who is behind this plot has no intention of striking in the open. That is sufficiently evident. His aim is to act noiselessly, but surely, in the dark. He hovers over the Cavalier, tracks him step by step, allows him slowly to walk into the trap. In the shadow he weaves his web, and watches the poor fly little by little enmesh himself. The crafty spider will not leave his hiding-place until his prey has become so entangled that it will not be able to break the hideous threads that hold it."

"But why, why this trap and this spider's web?" asked the poet, shuddering.

"Why? Do you remember that evening when you introduced your friend to us?"

"At *The Pineapple* . . ."

"I can still see the marvellous eagerness with which he ate . . ."

"And how he emptied those bottles."

"Well, you remember the misfortune that had befallen him—a casket which was his dearest possession had been stolen."

"I remember."

"Since that day the Cavalier has been pursued."

"Impossible!"

"I know that it is true! Why, that very evening a trap was laid for him at his lodgings on the Montagne Sainte-Geneviève. I learned this from friends at the Hôtel de

Nevers. Our friend miraculously escaped this trap, and left Paris."

"Yes, I know—in the company of Monsieur Bernard."

"Then they lost his trail. After separating from his companions, the Cavalier continued on to Sedan. Well, something happened which I don't in the least understand, but the result was that his enemies again picked up his trail. Without his having any idea of it, he was followed step by step all the way back to Paris."

"Monsieur de Vauselle!" groaned Cyrano. "That's another little item to chalk up to his account."

Saint-Amant continued:

"So that explains the disappearance of the casket and the dogged tracking of its owner."

"How do you reach that conclusion?"

"In this way: the casket must have contained papers so interesting to the man who discovered them that he at once wished to get possession of the owner as well."

"But, again, I ask you why?"

"Listen! Do you know who Monsieur Bernard is?"

"The Duchess of Chevreuse."

"Why, Savinien, how did you find that out?"

Cyrano answered evasively:

"Oh, I've made some pleasant acquaintances myself during the last few weeks."

"The Duchess is a friend of the Queen. Well, those who are pursuing the Cavalier must also be the adversaries

of Madame de Chevreuse—and, it follows logically, the persecutors of the Queen."

"I begin to see a little light . . ."

"And so, Savinien, my son, all this plot is directed not principally, against the Cavalier, but against much more important and distinguished persons—against the Duchess, against her friends, against . . ."

"The Queen!" exclaimed Cyrano.

"This time you have shown amazing perception."

"The very devil! It's a bit clearer now. But how are we to discover the time and the place that these mysterious enemies will choose to step out of the shadow and strike the decisive blow?"

The giant interrupted him:

"Just a minute! At this point I hand over the floor to Linières. The poor fellow hasn't had a chance to say a word!"

"H'mm!" remarked the little man sheepishly. "Don't you think you would better keep on—you talk so well."

"Come, little one, do your duty."

With a friendly tug, Saint-Amant pulled his embarrassed friend off of the stand. Linières scratched his head, and finally began to speak in a timid voice:

"Well, I'll tell you . . . but first you must promise to keep your temper."

Cyrano, taken aback by this amazing preamble, scowled deeply, thinking that the little man was preparing some new pleasantry.

"Yes, please don't get angry. If you do, it will be the end of me."

Saint-Amant settled the matter by placing his great hand on the poor wretch's head, and saying solemnly:

"Speak, Linières, I will answer for your skin."

"Well, then. You may remember that we didn't see one another for some days after that night. Well, times were hard for me. Saint-Amant was gone somewhere or other, and . . . and . . . in brief, a day arrived when I could get nothing to eat."

"Didn't eat," groaned the gourmand compassionately, "not for a whole day—oh, poor man!"

"*Cornebiou*, let him speak, you overfed glutton. You were saying, Linières . . . ?"

"I was saying . . . no, no, I was walking around on an empty stomach when I happened to meet a friend of mine. 'Heaven bless my lucky star,' I thought. Alas, it turned out to be my unlucky star!"

"Go on, for heaven's sake!"

"Well, you must understand that this gentleman, for he was a gentleman, although he had suffered a few misfortunes in . . ."

"Right, right! Continue!"

"This gentleman, as I was about to say, had been an acquaintance of mine in the country. I was at the time a poet in a travelling company, and he was an actor . . ."

"An actor!" exclaimed Cyrano.

"Yes, he accompanied his sister, who played the leading

rôles. The woman has since come to Paris, and you'll probably see her some time at Marais . . ."

"At Marais!"

"Yes, she's acting in a tragedy written by her brother."

The Gascon now listened with bated breath.

"You can imagine my amazement. When I had last seen him he was a poor, penniless mountebank like myself. And here he was, a handsome nobleman, rich as Crœsus, his pockets filled with gold."

"There can't be the slightest doubt!" muttered Cyrano to himself.

"It was too good a chance to miss. I introduced myself to him, trusting that my fortunate friend would invite me to dinner. As a matter of fact he did invite me, but . . ."

"But . . . ?"

"He forgot to order for me. So, famished, I had to be a passive guest at his table, and watch the most luscious bits of food and the most delicate wines disappear under my very nose. All I enjoyed was the smell."

"The scoundrel!"

"It was a harrowing situation! Just think of it! I was a second Tantalus. With envious eyes I surveyed this feast spread out before me. My appetite redoubled. Ah, my poor stomach groaned in agony."

"Fool, why couldn't you leave?"

"You'll soon see. At the end of my powers, I finally decided to tell him of my poverty, and of my hopes of sharing his meal. He looked at me, amused, and said

with a hypocritical air of surprise: 'What, are you poor?' I turned my pockets inside out—an eloquent answer to his question. 'Well, my friend,' he exclaimed, 'for eight days I wasn't a whit better off than you! My purse was empty, and, in addition, the police were after me . . .'"

Cyrano breathed heavily, hanging on every word that the little man uttered.

"'Yes,' continued my singular host, 'I was as poor as Job, and constantly followed by the Cardinal's spies. I would certainly have fallen into their hands, except, God be praised, I was saved by a poor fool . . .'"

"A what?" gasped Cyrano.

Linières continued, unconscious of the poet's rage:

"'A jovial ass who protected me because he was smitten with my beautiful sister who . . .'"

The speaker suddenly stopped, alarmed by the terrible groan that the poet suddenly emitted.

"What's wrong with you?" he enquired.

"Nothing, nothing, continue!"

"At last my host began to show his hand. I could easily become as rich as he, and soon drink and eat to my heart's content. All I had to do was to enlist under the same banner, to serve his generous master, who required only loyalty and discretion of his servants . . ."

Cyrano, infuriated beyond words, made a threatening gesture, but Saint-Amant seized him by the shoulders, and said authoritatively:

"Listen, to the end!"

Linières continued:

"I hesitated—I had scrūples. But the man laughed at me. I asked him the name of his master; he avoided an answer. He said that he was the only person I had to know. He would give me my orders, and I would receive my reward from him. Well, you can imagine the rest. I was hungry . . . I accepted . . ."

"You did that!" exclaimed the enraged Cyrano.

"I was very hungry," answered Linières simply.

The Gascon was scarcely able to control himself as he demanded:

"What service did the rascal entrust to you?"

"Oh, a very simple thing. All I had to do was to carry a note to a beautiful fair-haired girl whom I was to find at the Hôtel de Nevers."

"Claire de Cernay!"

"That was her name. She was expecting this letter, apparently, for she seized it anxiously and read it with feverish haste. She didn't even listen to me as, following Vauselle's instructions, I started to explain that a certain young man had given me the note . . ."

"Oh, I see, it was an intercepted letter."

"Silence, let him speak!" interrupted Saint-Amant gravely.

"I waited for her to write an answer, which I agreed to deliver to the gentleman."

"Oh, you wretch, what cowardly treason!"

"Alas, I know it only too well now! In this manner I

carried back and forth several letters, always under the orders of Vauselle."

"The devil, and doubtless they were all read by him?"

"Most likely. Finally, they gave me a last duty to perform. The young man had written a letter asking for a meeting. This time I was to deliver the girl's answer to the man himself, who had now returned to Paris. He was waiting for me on the Lorraine Road, and several men were stationed there to point him out to me. Furthermore, they gave me a ring which was to be my identification."

"You recognized him?"

"Yes," sighed Linières. "You can imagine my astonishment when I recognized the young girl's correspondent as . . ."

Here the poor man stopped, looking anxiously at the impassive Saint-Amant and the infuriated poet. The latter impatiently demanded:

"Who? Who?"

"The Cavalier of *The Pineapple!*"

"My friend!" exclaimed Cyrano.

He made such a threatening gesture that Linières instinctively started for the door. Saint-Amant calmed the enraged Gascon.

"Alas!" moaned Linières. "I now realize what a crime I committed."

"Well, at least you should have warned the Cavalier that

he was followed, that his letters were intercepted, and that this meeting was a mere trap."

"I should have, it is true. But I did not dare to. And, besides, I had been paid in advance by Vauselle for performing this duty."

This naïve, honest confession disarmed Cyrano. Linières continued:

"So I completed faithfully my duty. But, at the end, I hastened to Vauselle and told him that I would no longer serve his master. He begged me. I refused. Then, with the direst threats, he commanded me to remain silent."

"And fear kept you silent?"

"Perhaps," answered Linières, simply. "At least I remained silent for the length of time it took me to find Saint-Amant. Hoping that it was not too late to act, I told him everything."

"And here we are!" concluded Saint-Amant.

Cyrano, scowling deeply, had become more and more alarmed during the little man's recital. Suddenly the scowl left his face, and he extended his hand to Linières.

"Very good," he said, "you have atoned for your sins."

The erstwhile messenger seized the outstretched hand, kissing it joyfully.

"He . . . he forgives me!"

The poet had resumed his worried manner, as he said slowly:

"There's no doubt that a trap had been set. The masked

man, that sinister figure always hidden in the shadow, is on our friend's trail again through Vauselle's treachery. They are aiming, apparently, at the Cavalier, at that charming little Claire de Cernay, and at the Queen herself! Everything points to an imminent and speedy attack. There's only one thing we don't know—where, when, how the blow is to be struck."

The two visitors, motionless and silent, watched their host continue his nervous pacing of the room. During this long conversation, evening had fallen, and the figures of the three men were hidden in the darkness.

"Each hour," began Cyrano again, "each minute that passes by brings nearer the fatal moment. Because of our cursed ignorance, there is nothing we can do—nothing to save two innocent children, and to protect the twice-sacred head of a woman, the Queen of France. Oh, *Dioubibane!*"

Discouraged by his helplessness, Cyrano threw himself into a chair.

"Oh, if only I knew where he was—my poor, poor Cavalier!" he moaned.

Hardly had he spoken these words when a loud knock on the door made three hearts beat furiously. The men looked at one another questioningly, and then, without a second's hesitation, Cyrano sprang forward and opened the door.

A cry of joy escaped from his lips. The Cavalier stood before him! Unable to utter a word, the Gascon grasped

his friend in his arms. Tancrède, astonished by this emotional reception, finally disengaged himself. Taking off his coat, he asked:

"Did you think I was dead, or had forgotten you?"

"What would one think, when, after leaving suddenly; you left us so long without news of you?"

"I was carrying out a sacred mission, and did not have the right to correspond with a single human being. Yet, you see, my one and only friend, that the first moment I am free I have come to you."

The poet, trying to hide the deep impression this affectionate remark had made on him, asked in a tone of reproach:

"What have you been doing all this time?"

Very simply, Trancrède answered:

"Political intrigue!"

"Nonsense!" cried Cyrano, suddenly resuming his rough manner. "Yes, nonsense! But, after all, you're here—alive and free."

"The devil! You receive me as if I'd just escaped from the grave!"

"You weren't far from it!"

The Cavalier looked questioningly at his friend. Cyrano continued:

"We'll not discuss that now, however. You're back at last, and I shall not let go of you. The prodigal son has returned, and we must kill the fatted calf! Your first duty is to dine with me this evening at *The Pewter Plate.*"

"This evening!"

The poet, not noticing the troubled look on the Cavalier's face, turned joyously to his two friends:

"You must join us too. We'll all dine together."

"You gave us no warning of the approach of such a serious event," remarked Saint-Amant, coming out of the dark corner in which he and his friend had remained so as not to interfere with Cyrano's welcome to the Cavalier.

"Oh, don't worry, I've many more surprises for you tonight. Cavalier, you know my friend, Saint-Amant—and, also, you may recognize this other gentleman."

The trembling Linières was pushed forward to face Tancrède, who, on seeing him, exclaimed in amazement:

"Why, didn't you bring me a letter yesterday?"

"Yes, from the Hôtel de Nevers. I'm the man."

"But how do you happen to be here?"

"Didn't you recognize me?"

"No, but I do now. I remember it was at *The Pine-apple*, the first day I was in Paris. Ah, a great deal has happened since then!"

"Quite true!" groaned Cyrano.

The Cavalier held out his hand to Linières. The little man, overwhelmed by remorse for his treason, lowered his eyes, hesitating. Cyrano quickly helped him in his predicament.

"Why, you goose, take it," he said, pushing him forward. "Everything is forgiven."

"So," remarked the Cavalier, "here you all are again,

just as on that first evening. Yet you seem a little sadder now than then."

Tancrède had suddenly noticed the nervous uneasiness of the three men. The Gascon began to explain the situation:

"The truth is, Cavalier, that we had met together to talk of you."

"Of me? What were you saying?"

"We were saying . . . we were saying, h'mm, that it was time you arrived if you wanted any dinner."

Cyrano, overjoyed at his friend's safe return, had decided to postpone all explanations. After all, the danger was no longer pressing, since the young man was in their midst. The poet was determined not to let the Cavalier out of his sight again. Tomorrow they could make their plans!

"Come," he cried gaily. "It's getting late. It is high time to eat a bite, since we are to save our appetites for dinner later on—and remember, mine host of *The Pewter Plate* is expecting us to do justice to his famous cuisine."

"Oh, the devil!" interrupted Tancrède. "You're serious about this, then?"

"About what?"

"This dinner."

Saint-Amant raised his arms to heaven indignantly:

"He wants to know if a dinner is serious!"

"Alas, my friends, I cannot be with you."

"The devil! You're joking!"

"No, unfortunately. I am not free tonight, and in spite of the shortness of this glimpse of you, I must be on my way at once."

The poet exchanged a stealthy glance with his comrades. Then he looked steadily into the eyes of the young man:

"Not free?" he said. "May I ask where you are going?"

Tancrède seemed to be embarrassed:

"Oh, it's nothing serious—just a meeting, a little walk," he answered, lowering his eyes.

Cyrano seized the young man's head gently with his hands, and forced the youth to look him straight in the eyes:

"Why do you deceive us, Cavalier?"

"Cyrano!"

"Why try to hide the truth from us? I know what rendez-vous you have tonight. I know who arranged it for you, and who awaits you."

"Then," said the young man quietly, "you ought to realize that I cannot miss it."

"I do, and I also realize that I will not let you go there."

Tancrède disengaged himself, and said in a trembling voice:

"Monsieur de Bergerac!"

"Cavalier, my child, my friend, you must not go to the Louvre tonight."

"To the Louvre! Who told you that?"

"Is it very hard to guess?"

"Oh, Cyrano," exclaimed the young soldier, deeply hurt, "you have no right to examine me in this way. If I keep a secret from you, you know that it's not through a lack of confidence or affection. I'm beginning to regret that I came so promptly to see my old friend again."

"Don't say that," protested the poet, sadly. The young man continued passionately:

"Would you abuse the privilege of friendship to try to draw from me secrets that belong to others? Would you try to keep me from fulfilling what I consider a sacred duty, which . . ."

Cyrano stopped him with a sudden gesture and, controlling his emotion, said firmly:

"You can see whether or not I speak from accurate information. You have a rendez-vous tonight at the Louvre with Mademoiselle de Cernay, who is to lead you to . . ."

"Stop! How do you know this?"

"It is the truth, as you realize better than any one else. Cavalier, I repeat: you shall not go!"

Tancrède folded his arms, and surveyed his friend with a glance that combined anger, surprise, and reproach.

"You shall not go, because this rendez-vous is a trap!"

"A trap?"

"Yes, prepared by the man who has pursued you relentlessly, and who intends to use you as a weapon with which to achieve his cowardly ends."

"Why, that's absurd! You're upset over nothing."

"No, my doubting Thomas! I see I must be more ex-

plicit. This man was at the Palais this morning when you met Mademoiselle Claire de Cernay."

The young man turned pale.

"Are you sure?" he asked in a changed tone of voice.

"I was there myself!"

"So the secret of our meeting is known . . ."

"As well as every step you have taken, and every line you have written."

Linières corroborated this statement by a nod of his head.

"Imprudent boy, you have been followed from the night of your arrival in Paris."

Saint-Amant showed his approval by a deep grunt. Tancrède, overwhelmed, remained silent a moment, trying to understand the new situation. Who was it who followed him so closely, and what sinister design did he have? Finally, the Cavalier seemed to make up his mind.

"Well, I have a clear conscience," he said.

"What are you planning to do?"

"I shall ask him for an explanation!"

"You mean that . . . ?"

"Yes, I shall go to this rendez-vous. It is this evening at the hour of curfew at the Pont des Amours."

"What madness!"

"It would be madness to stay away through fear. I shall go. You say this man is masked—I'll tear the mask from his face. He weaves in the darkness an insidious web—I shall cut the threads of it with the point of my sword. You say he threatens those sacred personages to

whom I have consecrated my life—I shall be at their side to protect and to defend them."

"Be careful, Cavalier."

"Be careful! Of what? You must realize one thing, my friends. This audience which I have with great difficulty obtained is the one chance that fortune offers me. On it depends the realization of my heart's dearest hope. If I draw back, if I keep away through fear, it is the end of me—I shall remain forever the poor soldier. No, it is unpardonable for me even to consider it for an instant."

"But you will sacrifice your life if you fall into this trap!" exclaimed Cyrano, terrified by his friend's sudden exaltation. "You will never reach her who awaits you. Men have been placed to seize you on the way."

"I shall fight my way through them."

"You will be made prisoner if you go to the Louvre."

"Perhaps, but I shall be dishonored if I do not go."

"Is it dishonorable to avoid an unnecessary danger?"

"Oh, Cyrano, Cyrano, is it you who talk to me in such a manner! If I am not there at the appointed time, the assassins, hidden in the shadows, will be there just the same. And she who has trusted my fidelity and my loyalty, she will be there!"

"True, true," admitted the Gascon, shuddering.

"Am I to abandon this woman, weak, helpless at the hour of danger?"

"But there's still time to warn her."

"You're mistaken. There is no time even to . . ."

The sound of a clock striking the hour came to their ears. In an agonized silence, the three men counted the strokes.

"Eight o'clock!" exclaimed the heartbroken Cyrano.

The young man stood up proudly, and in an ominously calm tone of voice said:

"It is too late to prevent anything now. Cyrano, I put the question to you, what shall I do?"

The poor poet moaned in despair:

"Go!"

The Cavalier opened the door immediately, and rushed out of the room. Saint-Amant nodded his head slowly, while Linières sighed sadly as a tear of remorse rolled the length of his red nose. Both men, as if hypnotized, watched the young man disappear—on his way to danger, to death, perhaps!

When they finally withdrew their eyes from the door, a double cry of amazement escaped from their lips. Before them stood Cyrano, smiling joyously. He was completely dressed, hat on head, cloak proudly thrown over shoulders and sword at his side.

"Where the devil are *you* going?" gasped Saint-Amant.

Cyrano turned his head without answering. A strange fire glowed in his eyes, and his nostrils quivered as if scenting distant battle. He paused on his way to the door, and in a low, vibrating voice said:

"My friends, have you ever seen a spider lie in wait for a fly. Concealed in a corner of its web, the venomous insect watches its imprudent prey approach. Suddenly a loud buzzing is heard, and a wasp arrives, beating the air with the humming of its wings. The spider's attention is turned to this unexpected enemy, who might also fall a victim to the web. The wasp approaches and beats with its wings the almost invisible mesh, that shakes under these blows. The spider creeps forward cautiously, holding in its mouth a thread with which to enmesh the enemy. The wasp quickly dodges the danger, and returns to the attack, prepared to sting at the first opportunity. There follows a terrible death struggle. The insidious spider advances and retreats with cunning quickness, while the wasp resists valiantly, often breaking the web with the movement of its wings. The fight is long, unequal, and uncertain. But it sometimes happens that victory comes to bravery, not to trickery, to the winged insect rather than to the treacherous spider."

Cyrano paused a moment to catch his breath. Then with a gesture of extreme indifference he cried:

"After all, what difference does the decree of Fate make! Let the web close on the dying agonies of the wasp, or let the body of the murderous spider fall lifeless into the web. What difference does it make, if during the struggle the fly has escaped the peril!"

Without another word, Cyrano departed from his amazed

friends, and rushed out of the house in the direction of the Louvre.

"Well," muttered Saint-Amant slowly, "that is different —ve-ry dif-fe-rent!"

CHAPTER XI

THE DEMON FIGHTER

DURING the reign of Louis XIII the Louvre did not present the stately and imposing appearance it has today. In spite of the changes made by his predecessors, the old building still preserved many traces of its feudal past, which, with the recent additions, gave it a picturesque though incongruous appearance.

The great tower which had been a symbol of the sovereignty of the Kings of France over the nobility had disappeared to make room for the handsome buildings designed by Pierre Lescot. But the outer defences, with their numerous towers and sentry-houses, still remained. Thus the side facing Saint-Germain-l'Auxerrois, conceived in pure Italian renaissance style, rose from behind a barrier of mediæval turrets and walls. Along the foot of this façade was a moat, whose water came from the near-by Seine. In the daytime, this moat could be crossed by a drawbridge which led to the central gate. But after the curfew hour, the drawbridge was raised, and all entry into the Palace seemed impossible.

But if one were to walk along the moat toward the river, and examine the wall that bordered it, one might notice another entrance, less imposing perhaps, but accessible at all hours. This postern gate was carefully hidden by a series of projections from the wall. During the day it was used only by servants, particularly by grooms leading the horses from the royal stables to the near-by watering-place. But at night those having important messages to deliver could, by this gate, enter the sleeping Palace without observation.

According to popular report, the handsome Concini, who was later to become Marshal and prime minister, used to enter here when he was visiting Marie de Médicis. Thus it was called the *Poterne des Amours*, and the crumbling, tottering little bridge that led to it was given the name of the *Pont des Amours*. It was here that Claire de Cernay had agreed to meet the Cavalier at the curfew hour.

Indeed, a better place could not have been chosen for a secret meeting. All was quiet and peaceful. The rooms of the Queen's apartments, separated from the rest of the Palace, overlooked the dark wooded garden near-by. It was into this garden that one entered after passing through the *Poterne des Amours*.

At night the only sounds around this part of the Louvre came from the guardhouse, situated in a tumble-down old building beyond the *Pont des Amours*. The guardhouse presented the only obstacle in the way of a person who desired secretly to cross the bridge and enter the gate. But

if one continued down to the spot where the moat entered the Seine, he could climb back along the bank of the moat, and thus not have to pass the guardhouse. This manœuvre, it is true, required a certain amount of skill, particularly at night. Add to this the numerous stories of ghosts and phantoms that were supposed to haunt this mournful spot, and one can see that it would take a brave and determined heart to follow along the bank of the moat.

The gables of roofs and of projecting turrets were fantastically silhouetted against the dark sky. Here and there great battlements extended their massive bulks. The low, melancholy sound of the river could be heard in the distance. An evening wind charged with the accumulated depressions of this sinister spot moaned faintly.

Yet, on this particular night, neither the mournful setting of the place nor the memories that it evoked, were to deter a cavalier who, as the clock of Saint-Germain-l'Auxerrois struck the first quarter after eight, appeared at the Quai de l'Ecole. He was wrapped in a long cloak, and walked quickly but silently. At first hidden in the shadow as he passed along the wall of the Petit-Bourbon, he soon reappeared at the corner of the Rue du Louvre. He stopped suddenly as he found himself exposed to the light from lanterns hung in the guardhouse. After a moment's hesitation, he stepped back again into the shadow.

He examined the surroundings carefully. To his right, the Palace seemed to be plunged in sleep. All the lights on that side of the building had been put out, although it

was still three-quarters of an hour before the curfew should sound. Only in the guardhouse were there signs of life. In front of it stood a soldier, gun on shoulder, wearing a cloak with the embroidered cross.

"A musketeer!" groaned the newcomer between clenched teeth. "A bad omen!"

The man's hesitation, however, was not long. Turning to his left, he made his way toward the Seine. There, descending the river bank, he reached the spot where the horses were watered. Looking around to make sure that he was not observed, he advanced to the moat and climbed its embankment after some difficulty. Then he began, slowly and cautiously, to follow along it. He had to be careful at each step not to slip and fall into the muddy water beneath him. Finally, he stopped on reaching the bridge. He was none the worse for this scramble, except for a little mud that clung to his boots and to the bottom of his cloak.

Suddenly the clock struck twice.

"Half-past! I've arrived in time!" murmured Cyrano.

The little bridge groaned with the weight of the newcomer. The noise seemed to awaken a thousand echoes in the quiet of the night. But the valiant Gascon showed no signs of alarm; in fact, he now appeared to have thrown aside his previous caution. His manner was bold as he passed confidently over the bridge.

The sound of approaching footsteps seemed to evoke

the greatest curiosity in a soldier who stood on the other side of the wall.

"*Mordiable!*" he muttered to himself. "It's only half-past. Is our man going to be early?"

As the sounds continued, the soldier hastened to look through a little peep-hole in the wall. Scarcely had he put his eye to the opening, when he jumped back, exclaiming softly:

"It is he!"

At the same moment, as if to confirm these words, he heard the loud sound of some one knocking on the gate with the hilt of a sword.

"Oh ho, my young man," he murmured, "we're in a hurry tonight!"

A sinister smile passed over the soldier's coarse face. Turning around, he gave a signal. Immediately shadows began to creep forward cautiously from behind every tree and bush. On a second signal, twenty swords were drawn from their scabbards. At a final signal, the shadows advanced one by one, and grouped themselves in a semi-circle near the door. All these mysterious preparations were made noiselessly in the course of a few seconds.

The impatient visitor on the other side of the door, however, seemed to find the time long. A second knock, harder than the first, shook the gate, threatening to burst it in.

"On guard!" whispered the leader of these phantom soldiers.

At the same time he roughly pushed open the gate. Through the opening rushed in not a man, but rather, as it seemed, a thunderbolt. Before the astonished guard had time to realize what was happening, Cyrano, still concealing himself carefully in the folds of his long cloak, broke through the centre of the group, and advanced to the other side of the garden.

When once his prey had passed the door and advanced into the trap, Ruvigny had hastened to shut the gate to cut off all retreat. But, on turning around, a cry of amazement escaped from his lips. Instead of seeing his victim surrounded, paralyzed, captured without a chance to resist, he saw the man standing against the wall on the other side of the garden, waiting calmly, nay insolently, for the attack. The leader of Mazarin's hirelings passed his hand over his brow to make sure that he was not dreaming. No, there were his men, with drawn swords, ready to move on the first signal. And there was the newcomer, miraculously escaped from this trap, looking at him with a fiery, mocking gaze that made him shiver.

"Come, Cavalier!" he cried roughly. "Let us have no nonsense. You're caught. You can see that we are too strong for you, three times over. Give yourself up."

Encouraged by the deep silence which answered his words, the soldier began to advance confidently toward his waiting adversary. He was speedily disillusioned! With an undignified backward leap, he barely avoided a sudden lunge. Without a single word, the man in the cape had

disengaged his right arm and thrust a long, sharp, slender blade within two inches of Ruvigny's nose.

"*Mort de ma vie!*" he exclaimed. "One step more and I should have been run through. Do you think you can resist, you fool?"

The only answer Ruvigny received was a slight shrug of his adversary's shoulders.

"Just as you like! They said you were a young lion. We're delighted to see you ready to fight. We'll show you how twenty panthers handle a lion cub."

A sinister laugh ran through the ranks of Ruvigny's followers. But their lone adversary did not stir. Draped in his long cloak he stood like a statue. The only sign of life that he showed was a steady, heavy breathing, which was heard clearly in the silent night.

"On my soul and honor!" exclaimed Ruvigny, amazed by his adversary's calmness. "I think the man is mocking us. Come, my men, advance! No noise. Be careful. Take him alive and save the skin—it's worth money."

The soldiers were only awaiting this order. Now recovered from their first astonishment and assured of victory by their number, they rushed forward in a body to attack this man, who dared, alone, to face their twenty swords!

In a low voice Ruvigny gave his orders, trying to restrain the men as well as to encourage them. Above all he was anxious to bring his prisoner unhurt to Mazarin who was waiting impatiently in the shadow.

"Down with the Cavalier!" cried twenty hoarse voices.

"Take him, take him—but gently, lads," cried Ruvigny. "*Diavolo*, we must have him alive!"

All was quiet now except for the sinister clashing of blades, and the deep panting. Twenty sword points tried to reach one mark, attacking continuously, aiming at arms, shoulders, legs. With back against the wall, the swordsman involved in this unequal combat stopped all their thrusts. His sword rose and fell, parried and counter-parried with lightning speed. Protecting him from head to foot, his flashing sword became a living curtain of iron.

The astonished soldiers now began to look at one another apprehensively. Their faces were bathed in sweat and blood. The miraculous sword of the Gascon seemed to have left its mark on every man. At each stroke the aggressors cried out:

"What a blade!"

"It's a demon!"

"His eyes shoot fire!"

"His sword is a thunderbolt!"

"He strikes everywhere at once!"

"You can't reach his body!"

"The very devil! Can't we bring this lion cub down?"

In the centre of the struggle, Ruvigny moved here and there, encouraging the flagging spirits of his followers.

"*Démonios!*" he swore. "Shall he make fools of us—this one man, and he a beardless boy!"

"Beardless!" exclaimed one of the men. "How do we know that?"

"You can't see his face . . ."

"Only his eyes!"

"Well, *parbleu*, what's the difference! It's the Cavalier, that's enough!"

"The Cavalier? You mean the devil!"

"Devil or not, at him again. He's ours! Strike at his legs, his thigh, his arms."

And yet the demon fighter, still hidden in the shadow, continued imperturbably to resist all attacks. Although he had constantly to parry the numerous thrusts, he still found time now and then to make a quick thrust himself. On each of these occasions a man would fall back, bleeding from his wounds, or collapse writhing on the ground.

"Comrades," called the infuriated Ruvigny, "your fortune is in your swords. A hundred crowns to the man who brings down the Cavalier. Come, at him again!"

Spurred on by this new hope, the soldiers redoubled the attack, their eyes bright with greed. At the same time Ruvigny, determined to end the struggle at any cost, took advantage of the confusion to climb the wall. Gliding along it noiselessly, he slipped to the ground a few feet from the fighting cavalier, and then, drawing his sword, crept, like a snake, toward the Gascon.

Suddenly a terrible cry rang out! Ruvigny fell to the ground, while his sword flew off into the darkness. With a dexterous downward thrust, Cyrano's blade had anticipated the trooper's cowardly attack, and Ruvigny's hand was pinned to the ground by the blow.

Now the fight became desperate, savage. The ranks of the soldiers were somewhat thinned, but those remaining fought more furiously to win the fortune that seemed so near at hand. Suddenly the lone fighter, maddened by the thrusts of his opponents and tired of this constant defensive parrying, decided to change his tactics. Giving up all idea of protecting his own body, he began to lunge and thrust into the dark mass that confronted him. There quickly appeared a gap in the line of his attackers, who realized that they now had to save their lives. In the face of his irresistible charge, they gave up all hope of trying to reach the body of the demon warrior. The Gascon advanced slowly, steadily, his flashing sword striking right and left with superhuman speed. One by one Mazarin's hirelings fell back, thinking only of keeping away from the death-dealing sword.

Cyrano no longer tried to conceal his features. His opponents trembled before this heroic face, covered with sweat and blood and grime, transfigured by supreme wrath and fury. Eyes flashing, nose thrust defiantly in the air, a mocking, fierce smile on the lips, and a low hissing sound coming from his panting lungs, Cyrano charged once more, and now found himself master of the field, not a sword daring to oppose his invincible weapon.

CHAPTER XII

CYRANO'S SACRIFICE

"STOP! In the name of the King!"

Suddenly a martial figure had appeared between the brave Gascon and his discomfited adversaries. This unexpected order did not seem to produce the desired effect. The newcomer touched the drawn swords with the baton he carried.

"Swords in scabbards, every one!" he ordered. "Who dares to disturb the repose of Her Majesty, the Queen?"

At the second command, all suddenly became quiet, as if by magic. A profound silence followed the din of battle. But an even more amazing fact was that Cyrano, the invincible conqueror, tasting at last the hard-earned fruits of victory, Cyrano also stopped his advance! With a quick movement, he wrapped himself carefully in his cloak, and, with amazing humility, retreated into the deep shadow.

Who was the man who with such simple audacity obtained this sudden calm? His uniform showed him to be an officer of the guards, and he was followed by four or five men dressed in the scarlet coats of the musketeers.

But neither the officer's resolute manner nor his body-

guard were enough to make the master swordsman, Cyrano, retreat. The Gascon, determined at all cost to clear a passage for the Cavalier, was not the man to retreat before this new obstacle. And yet he had been stopped short by the officer, who now folded his arms quietly, master of the field. The reason for Cyrano's action had been his sudden discovery that the newcomer was his former adversary at the Convent of the Carmelites, his one great *bête-noire*—Monsieur d'Artagnan.

Cyrano realized that he could no longer continue this ruse before the Musketeer. Alas, the lieutenant would never mistake his profile for that of the Cavalier! So the Gascon had hastily retreated from the sight of the newcomer. For the second time fate had placed face to face these two men, equally brave, equally skilful. But this time the situation was reversed. The poet was not attacking an opponent who insisted upon keeping on the defensive. It was he now who was forced to hide himself and avoid a conflict.

"*Mordious!*" he groaned. "What a change! This time I am the statue!"

In the meantime d'Artagnan and Ruvigny had stepped to one side for a brief conversation. The lieutenant, explaining that he had chanced to come upon the conflict during his rounds of the Palace, demanded of Mazarin's henchmen the reason for his presence there. Ruvigny replied that his master had instructed him to watch over Her Majesty's safety. Mazarin had been warned that a man

would try to penetrate into the Queen's apartments that night, and he had stationed his men there to seize the malefactor.

The Musketeer understood the Italian and his cowardly plots too well to put much faith in this story. Yet he, an officer of the King attached to the Cardinal's service, could not oppose the arrest of a nocturnal intruder. But, determined to keep the cowardly hands of Mazarin's men off of this valiant gentleman, d'Artagnan said authoritatively:

"Monsieur de Ruvigny, the duty of protecting the Palace belongs to the King's guards. These gentlemen and I are supposed to watch over the Queen's safety, and to arrest any one who tries to disturb her."

"Yet, Monsieur d'Artagnan, my orders are that . . ."

"Your orders must give way to mine," interrupted the Musketeer. "You must not dispute the instruction given by the King and by His Eminence."

Ruvigny reluctantly bowed. However, he made signs to his men to remain where they were, and to keep watch on the situation.

D'Artagnan advanced toward the lone fighter, hidden in the shadow.

"Sir," he said in a low voice that could not be heard by the others, "my duty forces me to oppose your plans. You have been discovered near the Queen's apartments. I must assure myself of your person. Be kind enough to give me your sword."

Cyrano trembled from head to foot with suppressed emo-

tion. The Gascon tried to analyze the situation. If arrested, he would be recognized, which meant the certain capture of the Cavalier. All his trouble would have been for nothing. Should he resist? He could still offer a stout resistance to these men, and if he prolonged the fight for a few more minutes, all might be saved. These thoughts flashed quickly through his mind. At the same time he felt a blind fury seize him. Should he, de Bergerac, give up his sword to this man without a struggle—to the man who had treated him like a school-boy the first time they crossed swords? What would the Musketeer think of him if, having once fought against him when his blade was in its scabbard, he should now recoil before the naked blade?

D'Artagnan spoke again, this time with hidden meaning in his words:

"Cavalier, your obstinacy will be your undoing. Think of those who await you, and remember that open resistance on your part can only compromise them. Give up your sword, in the name of the Queen!"

Cyrano had now made up his mind. His only answer to this summons was to draw his sword. D'Artagnan angered by this insulting answer to his generous offer, cried out in a loud voice:

"Who ever you are, give up your sword, in the name of the King!"

"In the name of the King!" repeated the Gascon ironically. "The name of the King—nonsense! Say rather

in the name of your mysterious master who arranges his murderous ambuscades at night. In the name of that cowardly scoundrel who dares not face a man, but prepares his dastardly plots against women and children!"

D'Artagnan stopped, amazed, at the sound of this voice. His eyes tried to pierce the darkness to make out the face of his insolent adversary. But all he saw was two fiery, sparkling eyes. Enraged by the implications in the man's remarks, he stamped his foot in anger, as he said:

"Once more, will you surrender, or must I use force?"

"I invite you to."

"Come, you are letting your temper run away with you. Think once more, before you make an irrevocable decision."

"You are a most patient gentleman."

"I am no more patient than you are polite, young man. Hand over your sword!"

"This sword," answered Cyrano, "has never given way to any one. It was presented to me by my honored father, who made me swear to use it well. Even if God himself asked me to hand it over to you or to your master, I would refuse!"

"*Sandis!*" ejaculated d'Artagnan. "That's too much. Forward, Musketeers!"

"Ah, I knew you wouldn't dare try to take it yourself."

The Musketeer stopped his men with a quick gesture.

The sarcasm had carried home. His courage had been questioned.

"Alone," he said, "so be it! I wished to spare you, Sir, but you have prevented me. May your blood be on your own head. You must expect no mercy from me."

On hearing the threatening words, Ruvigny rushed forward, trembling:

"Monsieur d'Artagnan, Monseigneur's orders are strict. This man must be taken alive."

"Alive!" repeated Mazarin's hirelings, still hoping that they might win the reward.

"Silence, all of you! My honor is more important than your orders."

"Alive, Monsieur d'Artagnan, alive," begged Ruvigny again. "If you kill the Cavalier, all is lost!"

The lieutenant's only answer was a shrug of the shoulders. Turning to the supposed Cavalier, he said in a low, vibrating voice:

"Sir, I am very sorry, but *it is absolutely necessary that I kill you!*"

"Try it, then," replied Cyrano, placing himself on guard.

The Musketeer drew his sword. He had made a momentous decision, but his manner was still cool and impassive. In vain had he tried to bring about a peaceful outcome to this situation. The man, whom he believed to be the Cavalier, had refused to give up his sword. From Ruvigny's remarks, d'Artagnan realized what use was to be made of the young man. The situation was desperate,

for, above everything else, he must keep the Cavalier from falling into the enemy's hands alive. The lieutenant could not spare his adversary in the approaching duel. Only the Cavalier's death could save the honor of Anne of Austria.

"For the Queen," he murmured, coming on guard.

The two blades crossed.

"At last," exclaimed Cyrano, joyfully, "we can have our fun."

But scarcely had the combatants begun to fight, when a distant noise came to their ears. In the quiet of the night they heard the rolling of drums and the blare of trumpets. With a shiver, Cyrano exclaimed:

"The curfew!"

At the same time the bell of Saint-Germain struck solemnly the hour.

"Nine o'clock!" thought the poet.

A profound stillness followed this sound. Cyrano still listened, holding his breath. D'Artagnan, surprised by this sudden pause, suspended his attack. Almost involuntarily, he too listened. What could these two adversaries about to engage in a death struggle, have heard to distract them? Their blades still continued to clash, but mechanically. Their attention was elsewhere.

They were listening to a sound so faint that it was inaudible to the ears of Mazarin's men. Merely the light crunch of a foot on the gravel, and the soft swish of a long robe.

"Claire!" murmured Cyrano. "Claire de Cernay!"

A similar, slightly harsher sound came from the other side of the wall. Some one had crossed the *Pont des Amours*.

"The Cavalier!" groaned the poet.

In the heat and noise of his previous struggle, the Gascon had forgotten everything—even the meeting of the two young people at the curfew hour. The valiant poet had thought that in half an hour's time his sword would have left the passage clear, first engaging with Mazarin's henchmen and then drawing them off to some other corner of the Palace. But, alas, d'Artagnan had appeared, to spoil his plans.

Now the danger was pressing, imminent. The Cavalier was approaching and Claire was coming to meet him. The men who were to seize them still remained on the spot. Nothing could save them—it was too late!

The poor poet thought of all this while he continued to thrust mechanically at his opponent. He expected any minute to hear the signal that would mark the end of this sinister tragedy. The Cavalier and Claire de Cernay would be seized, and in his mind, arose the vision of another person who would be in danger—a person of majestic beauty, whose face would be covered with tears of shame and disgrace.

"The Queen . . ." he murmured. "I must save the Queen, and these two innocent children."

The voice of d'Artagnan reached his ears, seeming to come from a great distance, as if heard in a dream:

"*Mordious,* Monsieur, what's wrong with you? You're not protecting yourself."

But the poet's mind was thousands of miles away, thinking of but one thing:

"Save the Queen . . . save them . . ."

The sound of a knock shook him as if he had been struck by a thunderbolt. Yet the knock on the gate had been so light that the men who were watching the outcome of this strange duel with breathless interest heard nothing.

"Save them . . . save the Queen . . ." repeated the poet as in a trance, unable to think of anything else. Suddenly a thought flashed through his mind, like a stroke of lightning in a dark night.

"Yes, yes, it will work."

Then in a voice whose strength astonished even the poet himself, he cried out:

"Stop!"

With a noble gesture he raised his sword and threw it at the feet of d'Artagnan.

"I surrender!"

It was the only way left to save his friend—and his Queen.

Before the stupefied d'Artagnan had a chance to say a word, Mazarin's mercenaries rushed forward to their unarmed enemy. With savage joy, they seized the brave

Gascon, and dragged him off to the far end of the garden. D'Artagnan, still dazed by the sudden turn of events, watched them disappear like jackals carrying off their prey. In the still night he heard Ruvigny's gloating laugh as he gave directions to his men to take the prisoner to the guard-house.

With heavy heart, the Musketeer leaned over to pick up the sword, a sad trophy of his unexpected victory. As he straightened up, he suddenly heard the sound of a furtive foot-step near him. Some one was advancing cautiously, apparently alarmed by the noise of the recent fight. Soon he recognized a woman's figure. She stopped two feet away from him, but was unaware of his presence. As she listened anxiously, there was another light knock on the gate. Then, without hesitation, she hastened forward and opened it. The tall, handsome figure of a young man appeared in the opening.

"At last!" she said, taking the newcomer by the hand. "Come quickly; they await you."

Without another word the mysterious woman conducted her companion along a little path leading to the Queen's apartments.

D'Artagnan had been an involuntary but interested witness to this scene. He rubbed his eyes in astonishment:

"There can't be the slightest doubt! It's he, the Cavalier! But who in heaven's name is . . . ?"

He was plunged in thought a moment, a deep frown on

his forehead. Suddenly his face cleared, and the Musketeer laughed quietly.

"Of course, the other . . . the man I was going to kill. . . . Oh, *sandis!* This is too good to be true!"

In an outburst of relief and joy, he added:

"*Pardieu*, I should have suspected that! And to think that I took the noble fellow's sword! Faith of a Musketeer, he deserves it and I must return it to him. The man's a real Gascon—brave and loyal. We'll settle our score for that night at the Carmelites another time. Meanwhile, I must hasten to the Italian and tell him that the Cavalier has been seized. I want to be the first to give him the happy news!"

So saying the Musketeer started toward the Palace, holding fast to Cyrano's sword. A broad smile appeared on his face as he thought of Mazarin's pleasure when he learned of the perfect success of his ambuscade.

CHAPTER XIII

WON, BY A NOSE

WHILE these exciting events were taking place, the man who was the most interested in them walked feverishly up and down his little room in a wing of the Palace. Sometimes Mazarin would stop to look out the window into the dark evening, listening intently to the sounds without. The curfew hour, the time fixed for the execution of his plan, had arrived. Each moment he expected Ruvigny to appear. What answer would he read in his accomplice's face to the question which was consuming his very soul? Would he at last hold the secret that would put the Queen at his mercy?

He thought to himself:

"Imperious Anne, royal daughter, sister, wife, has the hour come when you must bend your proud will before mine? Is the son of an obscure Neapolitan fisherman to dictate commands to the granddaughter of Charles V? What a fascinating dream! Tomorrow she will make me more powerful than poor Monsieur de Richelieu. For tomorrow, the Cardinal and the King both dead, there will remain but one ruler in France: the Queen—or rather,

Monsieur de Mazarin! Oh, blessed fortune! France and her gold at my feet!

"Yes, but has Ruvigny been successful? He can't have failed, it's foolish even to consider such a possibility. Have I not the protection and help of heaven? Wasn't it a gift of Providence that put me in touch with this Vauselle? Without him I might have completely lost trace of the Cavalier. To think that His Eminence would have hanged that splendid fellow! Always brutal, Monsieur le Cardinal! A few coins can do more with men than all the gibbets in the world!

"Quarter past! Ruvigny is late. It should be over by this time."

The noise of some one approaching in the corridor put a sudden end to the Italian's reflections.

"Here he is, at last!"

The door of the room was quickly pushed open as a man entered.

"Well? Is it done?" asked Mazarin, breathlessly.

He suddenly drew back on seeing his visitor. The gentleman was not the one he had expected. With the greatest surprise, he recognized d'Artagnan.

"What's happened? Ruvigny . . . ?"

"Wounded!" answered the Musketeer qūietly.

"*Diavolo!* But the man . . . the man . . . ?"

"Captured!"

Mazarin breathed a long sigh of relief. A triumphant smile appeared on his pale lips.

"Good, Monsieur d'Artagnan! Splendid! Come, quickly, we haven't a second to lose. Captured! Thank God! You are a noble soldier, sir, yes, yes, a most noble soldier. Where have they taken the prisoner?"

"To the guardhouse, I believe."

"Splendid! Perfect! You will accompany me, Monsieur d'Artagnan?"

After arranging the papers on his desk with meticulous care, Mazarin seized his cloak, and, wrapping himself carefully in it, started off toward the guardhouse. D'Artagnan, always calm and smiling, went with him.

"Go, my good man," he thought, "run as fast as you like! You can't discover too soon what a wonderful prize you have captured!"

As d'Artagnan said, Cyrano had been led to the guardhouse. Perhaps led is not quite the word, as Mazarin's hirelings, still remembering the superhuman bravery of their adversary, had carefully bound and tied the poet. As soon as they arrived in the low, smoky room of the guardhouse, they threw their precious prize in a corner upon a little wooden bench.

The Gascon paid no attention to these minor insults. His mind was so filled with other thoughts, that he forgot his own present danger, and his bodily discomfort. His one thought was of the Cavalier. Had the two young people been able to reach the Queen's chambers? There, at least, they would be safe as no enemy dared to cross that

sacred threshold. As the minutes passed, his bodily discomfort increased, but his mental agony was lessened. The feverish haste with which they had seized him and the careful watch they still kept over him seemed to prove that his ruse was discovered. He was still the "Cavalier."

The noble Cyrano could thus congratulate himself on the success of his plan. His one duty now was to preserve his false identity while the Cavalier was engaged in his all-important interview with the Queen. But a new thought came to him as he heard the clock toll off the succeeding quarters. Now that he felt assured of his friend's safety, he became solicitous about himself. The hour was approaching when his two friends would make their appearance at *The Pewter Plate*. And, besides Linières and Saint-Amant, there would probably be present the delicate, entrancing girl, whom he had been forced to neglect during his recent poverty. Cyrano, trusting to the assistance of the goddess of luck, had not cancelled the order for dinner at *The Pewter Plate*. He now thought bitterly that in a short time he ought to be tasting the daintiest food in Paris in the company of the pleasantest companions.

In spite of himself, the poet could not forbear a grimace as he compared his anticipated delights with his present uncomfortable position. His captors had tied him to the wooden bench as if he were a wild beast, and the cords began to cut his skin painfully.

Finally a soldier came up to him and loosened the bonds

that held his feet. The poet heaved a great sigh of relief, and then muttered to himself.

"*Mordious*, I must play the game skilfully now. At last I'll see this mysterious man who always hides his face so carefully. I must get out of this mess without compromising my friends."

His Gascon confidence never deserted him. But he did have a moment's disappointment when he discovered that only his feet had been freed of their bonds. This precaution seemed a bad omen.

After rising to his feet, he was pushed forward toward a small table, behind which sat a bent little old man, clothed in a large, black robe. There was an air of importance and of peevishness about him that seemed to identify him as a magistrate.

"Well!" exclaimed Cyrano. "Where did he drop from? He's not the handsome, masked gentleman I expected to see."

The little man looked at him with a scrutinizing glance.

"I see," continued Cyrano to himself, "he's some magistrate they've sent in to wrest my secret from me by questioning."

He bowed affably to the magistrate as he said to himself:

"Do your worst, my good fellow. You'll be cleverer than you look if you can convince me that I am not the Mysterious Cavalier himself!"

The little man answered Cyrano's politeness by a short, dignified cough. With this preface, he said in a high voice:

"We shall wave the customary preliminaries. I do not ask you your name or rank—they are sufficiently known to us."

Cyrano gravely bowed his head in approval. This decidedly simplified matters.

"And likewise I shall not ask you what you were doing in the Louvre at such a late hour. You are sure not to answer truthfully. Now that's all over with."

The man smiled contentedly as if astonished by his own cleverness. And the prisoner also smiled, highly approving of the magistrate's conduct.

"It's unbelievable!" murmured the Gascon to himself. "Everything is working out perfectly. If he keeps on in this way, I won't even have a chance to tell a lie."

The magistrate suddenly arose, and, leaning forward, extended his forefinger toward the prisoner. It was obvious that he now intended to deliver a crushing blow.

"Let us come to the important facts," he said threateningly. "You were to meet a woman at the hour of the curfew. Ha, ha! What do you think of that? You understand me, eh? A woman . . . to lead you to the Queen . . . eh?"

"Well, well!" thought Cyrano. "I'm beginning to see light. Yes, *sandious*, I know now what I'll do . . ."

"Absolutely correct!" exclaimed the Gascon in a loud voice. "You are a genius, oh, most worshipful judge!"

"No, no, I'm just an ordinary magistrate."

"Sir magistrate," said the poet, correcting himself with

feigned confusion. "Your brain is so subtle that I see I must confess everything. Yes, I was to meet a woman in the garden . . ."

The magistrate must have received very detailed instructions for, instead of profiting by the apparent volubility of the prisoner, he hastened to interrupt him.

"Not so fast! I have no interest in that side of the affair—it is reserved for more worthy ears. We must confine ourselves to preliminaries. What you and the lady intended to do is no concern of mine."

"After all, that would be rather indiscreet," confessed Cyrano, smiling.

"Affairs of State do not come under my jurisdiction. Young man, remember that we are discussing the preliminaries—only the preliminaries . . ."

At this point the little man began to write quickly in the ledger before him.

"The Cavalier Tancrède . . ."

Cyrano began to make a gesture of protest, but the magistrate peremptorily stopped him.

"Don't try to interrupt me! Tancrède, sergeant in a Flemish regiment, leave of absence duly signed by Monsieur de Gassion, entered on this day the Queen's gardens, hour and place above mentioned. Captured, after an attempted resistance, by Lieutenant d'Artagnan, officer in the King's Musketeers . . ."

"H'm!" remarked Cyrano.

"What's the matter?"

"Nothing! Just a thought that went through my head."

". . . in the King's Musketeers, admits he was to meet, at the above-mentioned time and place, a maid of honor in the service of Her Majesty."

"Did I say that?"

"Don't bother me! We both understand."

The magistrate re-read his report with entire satisfaction, and, rubbing his hands contentedly, said:

"Splendid! Now we can come to the matter at hand. Be kind enough to give me the papers."

"The papers!"

"*Parbleu*, yes! You didn't come to the Louvre empty handed. Please hand over those famous letters that you have brought with you from . . . you know well enough!"

This very definite request caused Cyrano an embarrassment that was not feigned. If they found no compromising papers on him, they would probably suspect some trickery. But the magistrate's impatience put an end to his reflections. The little man pounded the table with his fist:

"Let's have no acting at this stage of the game. Empty your pockets, my good man."

"I shall be delighted to," answered the poet good-humoredly, "but unfortunately these cords prevent my doing so."

"Oh, is that all!"

The magistrate with a gesture to Ruvigny and his fol-

lowers, who had remained in the room to guard their dangerous prisoner, said:

"Search the gentleman!"

Cyrano trembled as they advanced. His heart beat furiously, and a cold sweat broke out on his brow. With a great effort of will, he controlled himself. There was no use resisting, as the odds were now impossible.

"Oh, well," he muttered to himself. "This all makes the time pass. Search, my friends, search!"

While Mazarin's men were searching the prisoner, Ruvigny approached the magistrate, and a short dialogue ensued.

"It's strange," said the little man in a low voice, "this fellow isn't at all what I expected the Cavalier to be like."

"On my word!" answered Ruvigny. "That's just what I've been thinking!"

"Well, it shows how deceitful appearances are. They described him as a handsome young man . . ."

Cyrano, whose sharp ears had overheard this conversation, made a wry face at the compliment.

"They didn't even mention a certain characteristic which would have removed all doubt."

"Yes, there can't be another such . . ."

CHAPTER XIV

WHO DARES MOCK MAZARIN?

RUVIGNY did not finish the sentence. The prisoner, in spite of his shackles, made such a vigorous leap forward that the soldiers cried out in alarm.

"Well, have you finished?" asked the trooper.

"Here is everything we found, sir."

The searchers threw on the table the great mass of papers that they had discovered in the poet's well-filled pockets. The magistrate pounced eagerly on this rich haul. He glanced rapidly at several unimportant slips of paper, and then seized a large white document, which he unfolded with a triumphant laugh. But the laugh suddenly died in his throat, as he stammered:

"What's this? Words without sense . . . incoherent phrases . . . *'When from my window gazing . . .'* What the devil is this?"

"They call it poetry," explained the poet, smiling. "You are reading certain verses written to Mademoiselle Minou."

The magistate continued to examine the papers, turning them in every possible direction to discover some hidden meaning. His anger only increased.

"This is a fine, intelligent discovery we have made!"

"The fool doesn't like poetry," sighed Cyrano.

"*Peste!*" exclaimed the other, throwing the poem in disgust on the table. "It's a crime to mock justice in this way. Go to the devil with your pretty little verses."

"My pretty little verses, sir magistrate, are worth more than your bad prose!"

"My bad p-p-p . . ." stuttered the man of law, "my bad p-p-prose! Young man, you are making your case a great deal worse."

"How could I? You already charge me with rebellion, conspiracy, high-treason, and heaven only knows what else. That's enough to hang me three times over."

The magistrate again pounded the table with his fist.

"Once more I ask you where you have hidden the papers you brought with you from Sedan?"

"From Sedan? What makes you think they are from Sedan?" answered Cyrano, beginning to be annoyed by the length of this questioning.

"Because, sir, the enemies of the State are now there. You went to that city on a horse which Madame de Chevreuse was kind enough to lend you."

"Good old *Capitan!*" thought the poet. "How I wish I were on your back, a hundred miles away from this cursed fellow with his talk of secret papers."

"And, sir, you had the insolence to lay violent hands on a faithful servant of Cardinal Richelieu, one whose sacred robe should have protected him from such violence."

"Well, well, the Capuchin now. This is getting interesting!"

"You had the outrageous audacity to tie up this reverend father like a sausage. Could you not respect his piety and sanctity?"

"I tied up the Capuchin!" cried Cyrano.

"And in that humiliating condition, you left him to catch cold in the dining room of *The Shield of France.*"

"*Vertudiou!* That's a good one!"

"What! impious youth, do you laugh? Have you no shame?"

"Why make a fuss over a mere friar?"

"What insolence! Do you dare deny now that you have been in Sedan? You see that we are well informed. Come now—give me the letters at once!"

"Oh, *corbac,* stop deafening me with this noise about your letters! Hunt for them."

"Search him again!" exclaimed the enraged little man. "Examine the linings of his clothes, his boots, the brim of his hat. We must have those papers!"

The poet, preserving perfect good temper, watched this despoiling of his person. Soon his coat was torn, his pockets were turned inside out, his collar was in shreds.

"If I ever get out of here, I'll be in fine condition to dine in gallant company!" thought the Gascon bitterly.

"Nothing at all!" announced the searchers.

"Nothing!" thundered the magistrate from behind his table. "What will Monsieur Mazarin say?"

Suddenly Cyrano heard a voice whose peculiar quality he well remembered.

"Well," it said, "here we are at last, my dear Lieutenant."

The poet's breath came quicker, and his heart was filled with a thirst for revenge. The real battle was now to be fought! He would soon be face to face with the masked man of the Palais, he would at last see the features of this person who always kept in the shadow.

It was, indeed, Mazarin. He had just entered the room by a door behind the prisoner. Putting a check upon his impetuosity, the Italian thought it prudent to have the prisoner examined in due form by a magistrate. This would keep him inside the law if the affair ever came to public attention. Having decided that by this time the magistrate had done his duty, Mazarin entered upon the scene. Justice having had its turn, he would now have his!

The vivacious Secretary of State came forward, like a cat about to pounce on its prey. He looked triumphantly at the prisoner, whose back alone he could see, and then hastened to the magistrate's table.

"At last my friend!" thought Cyrano, watching the newcomer out of the corner of his eye. "We'll see how successful your methods are when you're dealing with a de Bergerac!"

As he finished this reflection, his blood suddenly froze in his veins. A second person had now appeared.

"Again!" groaned the poet. "Will the earth never open up and swallow that eternal Musketeer!"

The object of this vehemence was more calm and self-possessed than ever. Some particularly agreeable thought brightened d'Artagnan's eye, and made his lips tremble slightly as he surveyed the prisoner. In the meantime Mazarin had briefly run over the magistrate's report.

"You see, it's only a preliminary questioning," explained the nervous magistrate.

"Yes, yes, I understand!"

"The prisoner is rather . . . ūh, rather secretive."

"Splendid! We'll soon loosen his tongue! Let me have the papers."

"The p-p-papers? Monseigneur, they are not at all important."

"Give them to me."

"Well, really, you see . . . they're poetry."

"Poetry?" asked Mazarin, not understanding.

"Yes, verses, Monseigneur."

"Verses?"

"Yes, listen to this: 'My heart seized with faintness . . .'"

The little man suddenly stopped, embarrassed by his failure to discover more important papers. Mazarin, still stupefied, snatched the paper, and read:

"*My heart, seized with faintness!*"

Cyrano took advantage of this distraction to retire farther into the shadow.

"Zounds!" exclaimed the Italian, trembling with fury. "Who dares mock me?"

Raising his head fiercely, he tried to distinguish the features of this insolent person who had so little respect for the dignity of the law. But the prisoner suddenly turned his face to the wall. Mazarin could only see the man's broad back. Reassured, he smiled again.

"We'll soon find out about this! Come, my gallant Catullus, let us see your handsome face. I feel sure it will be worth seeing."

The prisoner, instead of complying with this gracious invitation, continued his careful examination of the stones in the wall. The Italian spoke again in an even more winning tone of voice:

"Come, be good-natured, Cavalier. You and I must have a nice little chat."

Approaching the supposed Tancrède, he touched him kindly on the shoulders. Then, slowly and regretfully, Cyrano turned around. The sudden look of horror and rage that came over Mazarin's face could not have been more striking had he beheld the head of Medusa rather than the poet's honest features. A ghastly grimace appeared on his pale lips in place of the honey-sweet smile. Eyes sparkling with fire and exasperation, hands trembling, sweat rolling down his face, he tried several times to speak. Finally, he stammered:

"The Cav . . . alier . . . Where is he? . . . The Cav . . . alier . . . Who is that . . . ?"

Ruvigny, alarmed at the turn of events, hastened to explain:

"Monseigneur, he is the man of the Pont des Amours, he is the accomplice of Mademoiselle de Cer . . ."

The horrible scowl that appeared on his master's face caused the remaining words to die in Ruvigny's throat.

"Damnation! I've been tricked!" shrieked Mazarin, sinking down on a chair. The little magistrate, looking about with frightened eyes, asked in a trembling voice:

"Then he is not the messenger from Sedan?"

"Heavens, no! I almost talked myself hoarse trying to get you to understand that!" said Cyrano cheerfully.

After the first moment of despair, the Italian soon gained control of himself. With a nervous step, he paced the room, muttering incoherent phrases:

"Tricked again . . . like Saint-Germain. . . . Is the Cavalier some phantom, then? Where is he now? With the Queen, or fled far away—out of my reach in any case. . . . Oh, if God would let me get my hands on him for just one day, one minute . . ."

In the midst of his feverish pacing he suddenly came face to face with d'Artagnan. The Musketeer was the only person who had preserved complete equanimity amidst this disorder. Mazarin seemed either to suspect the lieutenant of tacit complicity in the affair, or else he was enraged by his calm manner. Shaking his finger in the Musketeer's face, he cried angrily:

"Monsieur d'Artagnan, you will have to give an explan-

ation of your conduct to Cardinal Richelieu. Thanks to you, an enemy of the state has gained admittance into the Louvre this night."

The lieutenant suddenly interrupted the Italian:

"I have no idea what you are talking about. It is my duty to arrest any one who tries to break into the Palace. I found this man attempting to make a secret entry, and arrested him. That is all! May I ask what you expected me to do?"

"Oh, you play your part well, lieutenant. You knew perfectly that we wanted the Cavalier . . ."

"How was I to know that? Moreover that affair was entrusted to Monsieur de Ruvigny, not to me."

"You are right," admitted Mazarin reluctantly, as he regained control of his temper.

"Yet perhaps," continued d'Artagnan, striking while the iron was hot, "perhaps you were right. Certain people might misrepresent my conduct to His Eminence. On arresting this gentleman, I was acting at the request of Monsieur de Ruvigny, your assistant. I have become involved in an unpleasant affair, and have seized an innocent man. I had absolutely no instructions from my superior officers, and yet I have allowed the prisoner to be held here for an hour. Yes, I must hasten to take proper measures."

With his imperturbable coolness, d'Artagnan prepared to leave. The Italian stopped him with a quick gesture.

"Where are you going?"

"To the Cardinal. I must tell him of this affair at once."

"*Diavolo!*" exclaimed Mazarin, suddenly alarmed. "Don't be in too much of a hurry, Monsieur d'Artagnan. We can talk this over tomorrow. Of course, no one would dare to suspect your loyalty."

"Very well then."

"You're a real Musketeer, and show fire as unexpectedly as Vesuvius. After all, we must discover whether our prisoner is as innocent as he appears."

So saying, he fixed upon Cyrano a look full of distrust. This little skirmish between his two enemies had by no means escaped the poet's attention. The mysterious gentleman's nervousness when Richelieu's name was mentioned had been obvious. Cyrano muttered to himself:

"Well, well, the rogue doesn't have a clear conscience. We know his weak point already. Savinien, it is for you to play carefully now. Perhaps, if you're clever, you'll still be able to dine this night at *The Pewter Plate*."

In the meantime Mazarin dismissed his various assistants, keeping only d'Artagnan, whose good graces he was now most anxious to regain. The Italian was convinced that it was not a mere coincidence that had brought this stranger into the Queen's gardens. He must be some accomplice of the phantom Cavalier. Although Mazarin had very little to go on, he might still force the prisoner to put him again on the trail of the mysterious Tancrède. He thus pre-

pared to turn on the stranger the full battery of his cunning, and try to extract some information from him.

"Sir," he said severely, "you have been seized at night near the Queen's apartments. What brought you there? What did you expect to find?"

"Monsieur," answered Cyrano, with frigid politeness, "before I answer your questions, would you allow me to make two remarks?"

"What are they?"

"The first is that I am bound in a manner more suitable to a sausage than to a gentleman. This, I fear, will keep me from speaking freely."

"Very well! Lieutenant, be kind enough to unbind the prisoner."

"Thank you very much," said Cyrano in acknowledgment. "My second remark is this: who are you to question me?"

The Italian half rose, and then calmed himself, as he replied:

"I am one of His Majesty's faithful subjects, ready to render an account of all my actions to him, or to his representative, as for example, His Eminence, the Cardinal-Duke de Richelieu."

The sour face that the speaker made in giving this answer did not escape the poet's keen eye.

"First touch for me!" he said to himself.

"I am Monsieur de Mazarin, Secretary of State in His Majesty's Privy Council."

Cyrano bowed graciously, as if they were exchanging formal introductions.

"And I am Savinien de Cyrano-Bergerac, cadet in the King's guards, company of M. Carbon de Castel-Jaloux."

Again a deep scowl appeared on the Italian's face.

"Second touch for me!" commented the poet.

"But I did not realize that your company was on guard here today."

"Well, to tell the truth, neither did I."

"Then it was not in the course of your duties that you entered the Queen's gardens?"

"Oh, heavens, no! Something quite different."

"And what, sir cadet?"

"A rendez-vous!"

A triumphant smile appeared on Mazarin's face.

"Ah, now you speak intelligently. With whom was this rendez-vous?"

"Please don't ask that!" protested the poet, simulating great confusion. "Can a gentleman answer such a question?"

"Come, no false modesty. Who was the woman?"

"Oh, please . . ."

"One of the Queen's attendants?"

"Alas, you must allow me to refrain from answering."

"Very well," said Mazarin, irritated. "I forgot that you were so discreet."

"Third touch for me!" murmured Cyrano.

"Yes, I shall take your word for that. There is just

one thing I shall ask you to explain. How is it that at the very hour you were seized, another gentleman had a rendez-vous at the Louvre, at the same place, and, perhaps, with the same person?"

The Italian fastened a penetrating glance on his prisoner. The latter suffered this examination without flinching.

"How should I know?" he replied evasively. "A mere coincidence!"

"A rather unhappy coincidence, Monsieur de Bergerac, especially when the woman you hoped to see is Claire de Cernay, and the other member of this gallant group is your friend, the Cavalier Tancrède."

Mazarin had used one of his common ruses, mentioning these names at random, in the hope that Cyrano would let the truth slip out in denying such a false statement. The trickery was obvious to the shrewd poet, who disdained to reply.

"Are those not the names? Is not my information correct?" insisted Mazarin, who felt that he was now getting the upper-hand.

Cyrano, realizing that his position was a delicate one, decided to take the offensive. He struck back quickly:

"I shall answer that question if His Eminence, Cardinal Richelieu, will do me the honor of asking it."

"You refuse to answer me?"

"Upon that subject, yes. Reflect a moment. One of two things is possible. Either my presence here was a mere coincidence, and I must account for my amorous intrigue

to my chief, Captain Carbon de Castel-Jaloux; or else, as you imply, I am a criminal, a dangerous conspirator, an enemy of the State, a subject in rebellion to his King. In the latter case, the matter should be put into the hands of the high court, and I must ask you why you hesitate to deliver me into its jurisdiction."

Mazarin hesitated a moment, baffled by his adversary's logical reasoning. He finally spoke in a soft, pleasant voice:

"I was only hoping to save you. I am convinced that you are an innocent accomplice in these intrigues of which you probably know nothing. Yet you repulse my kind attempts to help you."

"What do you intend to do with me?"

"To keep you here under guard until the whole situation clears up a bit."

"Which means . . . ?"

"Until the Cavalier is seized."

"Hmm! That may be a long time."

"Well, it can't be helped! It's easy enough for you to make it short!"

"How can I do that?"

"By confessing the truth, and putting me on the track of the real culprits."

"Then I would be free?"

"On my word of honor."

"Very well," replied Cyrano, deciding to bring the matter to a head. "It will soon strike eleven, and at that hour

I have an appointment at *The Pewter Plate*. Several close friends are meeting me there for dinner, and I should hate to keep them waiting. And, besides, this guardhouse is a particularly unpleasant place. Those are my reasons for desiring to get out of here as soon as possible. You promise me my freedom if I tell you the entire truth?"

"Yes, on the word of Mazarin!"

Coolly, deliberately, looking fixedly at the Italian, Cyrano began:

"I do, indeed, know those whom you just mentioned."

"Claire de Cernay and the Cavalier?"

"Yes. They had a rendez-vous this evening at the curfew hour at the *Pont des Amours*."

"I know that."

"*Parbleu!* you obtained your information, I believe, from their own lips, this afternoon at the Palais, where you hid so carefully in the gallery with your face masked."

The Italian frowned deeply, vaguely uneasy. How was this devilish poet so well informed?

"I do not know what those two children intended to do at the Louvre this evening. But they are young, good-looking, and, who knows, perhaps they have fallen in love with each other. Sixteen is just the age when nocturnal trysts have their greatest attraction."

"Don't try to pretend that . . ."

"Please let me speak— You asked me to. By the purest coincidence I learned this evening that the secret of their meeting was discovered, and that a cowardly hand was

preparing a trap into which they would most certainly fall.

"How did I find that out? Well, perhaps I also have my spies. Why was this trap laid? I do not know. But some one here does, Monsieur de Mazarin—and you are he."

The voice of the brave Gascon, low and vibrating at first, had now become louder. It was harsh, accusing, threatening. The Secretary of State make a gesture of denial, and stammered:

"Do you dare . . ."

"Sir, you have asked for the truth, and must now allow me to state it. When I discovered that these innocent children were in danger, I swore on the word of Cyrano de Bergerac to save them. As you see, I did not go back on my oath! I threw myself into the web that you had woven. In vain will you try to connect the broken threads. The birds have flown, and heaven now protects the young lovers, far removed from your traps."

"By the Madonna, you have played your hand well, sir! Yet, even if you have broken my web, there are still enough threads left to enmesh you. *You* are the one who has fallen into a trap—now try to get out!"

"You are right! Let us continue this discussion a little further. You now know who I am, and why I have come here. Tomorrow, if you insist upon keeping me here a prisoner, the Cardinal will know the truth—the King will know it. They are my masters, even as they are yours. I owe them the truth rather than you!"

The Italian was disconcerted by his adversary's determined manner, and again began to pace the floor. His face twitched nervously as he tried to decide on his next move.

"Yes, Monsieur de Mazarin, I have told you the entire truth. You now understand the actions of the Cavalier and of his lovely friend—young lovers meeting for a romantic tryst. You realize the rôle I played—an innocent accomplice of these innocent children. There is just one thing that has not been satisfactorily explained—what is *your* connection with this affair?"

"Let us finish this, if you please, as soon as possible."

"I heartily agree. I have nothing further to say."

"If I let you go, will you promise to say nothing about this unfortunate affair?"

"I swear on my honor."

"Do not think that I fear any of your hidden threats," continued Mazarin, wishing to cover up his defeat. "But there is nothing to be gained by letting this little episode become generally known. That is why I am thinking seriously of releasing you. There is one condition, however, that I make—you must not become involved in the Cavalier's intrigues."

"I do not even know what intrigues you are referring to," replied Cyrano. "What I am most impatient to know is when we shall get through with this."

However the adroit Mazarin, unlike the Gascon, was in

no such haste. His pride and his spiteful temper refused to let him accept such a crushing defeat. Although prepared, if necessary, to release the prisoner, he still searched for some slight pretext on which to hold him. Suddenly a sinister smile lightened his face.

"You must remember one thing, Monsieur de Bergerac," he said slowly, coming near to the poet and touching him with his finger. "You must not forget how very different this situation would be if I had before me, not an accomplice in an innocent love affair, but an actor in a dangerous conspiracy."

This new attack worried Cyrano. What was the sly fox driving at now?

"Suppose you happened to be mixed up in a conspiracy which concerns the Princes, and whose leader is, need I say, the Duchess of Chevreuse!"

"Madame de Chevreuse!"

The alarmed poet suddenly thought of the evening at the Carmelites, and the part that the Duchess had played there. Did Mazarin know of his inadvertent presence on that occasion? Almost involuntarily, he looked at d'Artagnan, the only witness of that nocturnal episode. Had the Musketeer spoken to Mazarin? Was he about to betray him now? D'Artagnan, still keeping his formal military bearing, seemed to be completely uninterested in the scene that passed before his eyes.

Mazarin, who had not taken his eyes from Cyrano, interrupted the poet's reflections:

"Well, Monsieur de Bergerac, you seem to have lost some of your splendid assurance!"

"I? Not at all! Why should this interest me? What have I to do with the Duchess of Chevreuse?"

The Italian approached still nearer to him, and said in a low, penetrating voice:

"Will you swear that you do not know the Duchess?"

Cyrano stepped back a pace.

"Will you swear that on a certain night you did not accompany her to . . ."

"I?"

". . . the Convent of the Carmelites, in the Rue de la Bourbe?"

"Oh, word of a Bergerac! I'm lost now!" thought Cyrano.

"*Sangodemi!*" cried Mazarin, "I should have recognized you sooner! When you spoke, I kept saying to myself: 'Where before have I seen that proud gentleman with that indomitable will? Where have I seen that fierce fighter?' Why, *pardios*, in the Rue de la Bourbe, of course! Monsieur de Bergerac, what were you doing so near the Convent of the Carmelites that night? Was it another one of those 'pure coincidences' that always seem to lead you where you have no cause to be? You will soon have the pleasure of explaining that to the Cardinal? I must keep you under closer guard than before!"

"*Sandious!* We shall both make our explanations at the same time then!"

"Not too fast! Keep your temper! You are a conspirator against the State, and nothing that you say will be believed."

"At least you will have to prove what you claim."

"I think I shall have no trouble in doing that."

"You will have to show that I was seen at the Convent of the Carmelites."

"Yes, you are quite right. I shall prove it by the testimony of a most excellent witness, by a person who had a splendid opportunity to recognize you, and whom you yourself may remember. I suspect that on that night you greatly desired to send him into the next world!"

"Oh, well," thought the unhappy poet. "It's all over now. I took my chance and lost."

Mazarin, exulting in his unexpected victory, turned toward the Musketeer.

"Come here, Monsieur d'Artagnan. It seems that Monsieur de Bergerac can no longer remember having been at the Convent of the Carmelites on a certain night. You might refresh his memory a bit. His is not a face one is likely to forget. You recognize him, of course?"

D'Artagnan, having been called directly, could no longer keep his passive attitude. He looked searchingly at the poet, as if making sure of every feature. Poor Cyrano, feeling that he was lost, bore this examination impatiently. He was at the mercy of his mortal enemy, of the man whom he had so outrageously insulted. Why did the Musketeer

take so long to finish this unpleasant business—these useless preliminaries were extremely annoying, and unworthy of a gentleman.

Mazarin was no less impatient.

"Well!" he exclaimed. "You recognize your opponent?"

D'Artagnan finally decided to give the anxiously awaited verdict. In a very calm, deliberate voice, he declared:

"I do not know him!"

Cyrano almost fell over in surprise.

"You don't recog . . ." stammered Mazarin, stunned. "Why, it's impossible. Think again, Monsieur d'Artagnan, look at the man more carefully. It's he . . . he . . . Monsieur Bernard's friend . . . the protector of the Duchess!"

The Musketeer interrupted these protestations. Emphasizing each word, he said slowly:

"No, there can be no doubt. It is not he! It is not his bearing, his figure, his face. Besides, there is one definite proof. The man at the Convent of the Carmelites had . . . well, what should I call it? A little nose, a refined nose. Yes, I recall it quite distinctly. You might have said that the man had no nose at all."

If he had been carefully storing up his resentment for the insults he had received, d'Artagnan could not have gained a more crushing revenge on his old foe. During the Musketeer's carefully delivered opinion, Cyrano had turned pale, blushed, and then trembled. It was impossible

to endure such mockery. In spite of himself, he made a threatening gesture.

In the meantime Mazarin, overwhelmed by the failure of his plan, was lost in bitter reflection.

"Zounds!" he hissed. "I have been tricked! Monsieur de Bergerac, I have your word of honor that you will remain silent about tonight. Go, you are free."

At this moment the clock struck eleven. Cyrano, saved by a miracle, would be able, in spite of everything, to dine at *The Pewter Plate*. He rushed out of the guardhouse.

If the poet had seen the furious look on the Italian's face as he disappeared, he would not have been able to restrain a shudder. From this moment, Mazarin, thirsting for vengeance, had classed Cyrano with the Mysterious Cavalier.

But the brave Gascon was too happy and in too much of a hurry to worry now about the Secretary of State's hatred. He ran toward the inn where many delights awaited him.

CHAPTER XV

MOTHER AND SON

The Cavalier, escorted by Claire de Cernay, reached the apartments of the Queen without mishap. Anne awaited the messenger in a little oratory adjoining her sleeping apartment. In this retired spot, situated at the end of her own suite in the Louvre, there was no danger of being spied upon by a hostile eye.

As the two young persons entered the chamber, the Queen was seated before a little table, on which were two candles, whose flickering lights were the room's only illumination. Her noble face, which still preserved the clearness of coloring and the purity of expression of her youth, was clearly seen in the light. As they entered the room, it seemed to the young people as if her gracious head were surrounded by a faint halo.

Tancrède suddenly stopped in the doorway. He again felt that almost religious emotion which had overcome him the first time he had seen the Queen, at the Convent of the Carmelites. Yet now she seemed more approachable than on that night. Her meeting with the Duchess of Chevreuse had taken place only two weeks before, yet Anne of

Austria had changed greatly. The ravages of a secret grief had left their traces on the Queen's face and softened it. In her stately and noble bearing could now be traced an air of resignation. Her face, purified and refined, seemed less royal and more human than before.

As Anne made a sign to the young man to approach, a faint mist covered his eyes, and he bent one knee to the ground. With a kind and benevolent gesture, Anne again motioned the Cavalier to advance. She was deeply touched by this mute adoration, a homage to her beauty rather than to her rank. But when the youth stood up and she could see his face, it was her turn to be moved.

At the moment of his entrance, she had been thinking of Lord Buckingham. And by a strange turn of fate this young man, this unknown soldier, resembled the noble Duke. She quickly realized that this similarity must be due to some trick of the mind which often substitutes an imaginary picture for reality.

The strict, rigorous duties of court life soon teach sovereigns to control their emotions and to hide intimate feelings. The Queen's sudden surprise lasted only a moment, and it was in a calm voice that she finally spoke:

"Are you, then, the Cavalier?" she asked, a shade of surprise in her voice as she looked carefully at the features of this young man whose arrival had so startled her. The soldier bowed.

"Mademoiselle de Cernay has told me of your courage, and of the many ways in which you have risked your life

in the service of your Queen. And I am most surprised that, that . . ."

Anne finished the sentence to herself.

"A child, he's still a mere child!"

Tancrède, disconcerted by this strange welcome, did not know what to do. The Queen noticed his uneasiness, and hastened to add:

"After all, how could I know that in one so young, such great bravery and courage were combined with prudence and coolness! Yes, you have done more than could have been expected of any man."

"My star protected me," replied the young man quietly.

Anne trembled imperceptibly at the mention of the word "star." She looked with increased penetration at him. However, controlling her inward emotion, she said calmly:

"You are hardly more than a boy."

"I am sixteen years old, madame," protested Tancrède.

Anne started, as if suddenly struck.

"Sixteen years old . . . !"

"At that age, madame, one is no longer a page, if he is of noble blood. The Kings of France become of age when they are fourteen."

In spite of the sad thoughts that filled her mind, Anne could not help smiling at this proud protest.

"You are right, Cavalier! A soldier knows no age. No one can boast of greater bravery than you."

With a gracious movement, she held out her lovely hand to the young man. Tancrède kissed it respectfully.

"However," she said, "time presses. We shall consider later how we may reward your loyal services."

Almost involuntarily the young man looked at Claire de Cernay who had remained in the background, hidden in the shadow. Again a smile appeared on the Queen's face.

"Mademoiselle de Cernay has told me that you hope for much from me. Whatever your request may be, I trust that it will lie in my power to fulfil your expectations. But now we must leave all that. Let me see your messages."

The Cavalier quickly searched in the lining of his hat, and drew out a bundle of papers which he handed to his royal mistress.

"You have an original hiding place!" she remarked, amused.

"Yes, certain unfortunate adventures induced me not to trust my cloak. A hat is safer. You always have it with you, and, in case of danger, you can easily get rid of it."

"I see that you are as discreet as you are brave. I should not have questioned your age. You have the wisdom of a veteran."

The Queen, laughing at her messenger's embarrassment, seized the bundle of papers, and hastily broke the seal.

"Well," thought Tancrède, "I've made a good start. I hope that at last I hold my fortune in my grasp—if only it doesn't escape again!"

With this encouraging thought, the Cavalier discreetly

retired into the background, leaving the Queen to examine the messages. This movement brought him near Claire, who had guarded the doorway to make sure that no one should disturb them in this important and secret interview.

Indeed, Cardinal Richelieu would have paid a high price to know what the Queen was reading at this moment. As for Mazarin, his hatred of Cyrano would have increased three-fold if he had realized what important papers the real Cavalier had on his person. The sly Italian had almost won a greater prize than he could have hoped for in his wildest dreams. What a complete triumph if he had now held these messages which Anne of Austria opened with a trembling hand. Alas, Mazarin's only prize that evening was a poem written in honor of Mademoiselle Minou.

In the Cavalier's messages, the Secretary of State would have found a complete description of the movements of the enemy. In them was contained the answer to numerous questions that puzzled the minds of Richelieu and Mazarin. Why did the Count of Soissons, the King's cousin, refuse to enter France? Why did the Duke of Bouillon, disregarding all threats, continue to entertain the rebel Princes at Sedan? Why were all those who lived in exile and all those who disliked the present régime now assembling at this one place? These questions would have been completely answered. The master statesman could at once have realized the terrible rebellion that was on foot.

In truth, an imposing army was being collected on the

very borders of France. This army was to be vastly increased by the arrival of the troops which the Infanta would send through Flanders and which Marshal Lamboy would lead across the Ardennes. To this imposing display must be added the troops of Duke Charles who, forgetful of his promises to Richelieu, had once more rebelled.

Richelieu, tricked and deceived on every hand, could only trust in his own soldiers, who were not eager to fight against fellow-Frenchmen, led by a Prince of royal blood. At court the great statesman found about him discontented faces, ungrateful friends who were ready to turn against him at the first opportunity. His old enemies were now eager to gain their revenge. The favorite, Cinq-Mars, defied his authority, and the King, tired of his long tutelage, was more uncertain than ever.

Once before, the great Cardinal had seen the kingdom threatened, and the walls of Paris attacked by Lamboy's men. But on that occasion his indomitable courage and energy had prevailed. Now, alas, he was old, racked by disease and cares.

With one determined movement, the enemy could cross the frontier and easily overthrow La Meilleraye's small army. Before them the road to Paris would lie open. They could then accomplish their great ambition: the exile or death of Richelieu and his aides, chief of whom was Mazarin. The Princes needed to do two things before beginning this triumphal march: first, they must collect their entire force in one place—this was only a question of hours;

second, they must be assured of the Queen's support. This, indeed, was the one necessary prerequisite. Anne's formal approbation would prevent their attack being considered open rebellion. And, besides, her sister, the Infanta of Spain, would contribute her troops only on that condition.

We have already seen what the Duchess of Chevreuse, the organizer of the whole movement, had accomplished. That night at the Convent of the Carmelites she had gained from the Queen a promise of her support. The hour had now come for Anne to keep her royal word. The Cavalier had brought with him from Sedan the Princes' promises to recognize the authority of the King and Queen. As soon as Richelieu was disposed of, they would lay down their arms. The Princes, fearing Anne's scruples and her constant vacillations, had made her task easy. At the end of the document they sent her she had only to write one word: *Assentior*—I consent—and then affix her royal signature.

All of this Mazarin would have learned but for Cyrano's superhuman bravery and devotion. The noble Gascon had saved three persons from irretrievable disaster: first, Tancrède, who would have lost his head; second Claire de Cernay, whose remaining days would have been spent in a convent; and, finally, the Queen, whose crown would have been forfeit if the conspiracy failed, and her part in it were discovered. This, then, was done by Cyrano—Cyrano who had such mortal terror of political intrigue, Cyrano, who disliked politics. What would he have done

if he had been interested? In fairness to the poet it must be said that he had no suspicion of these intrigues, and it is also true, that the Cavalier and Claire were unaware of the terrible plot that was on foot.

By the flickering candle-light, Anne of Austria read feverishly, throwing one letter after another into the fire. Her poor heart, humiliated and tortured for so many years, was at last filled with the hope of vengeance and triumph.

But in the meantime very different sentiments filled the hearts of Claire de Cernay and her young friend. Finding the Queen so engrossed in the messages from Sedan, the Cavalier had gently drawn his companion out of the room into the adjoining corridor. For several minutes neither of them spoke. The young soldier was struggling to hold back the words which trembled on his lips, but which he could not speak to Claire until after this interview, when he should know his real rank. Claire, realizing the young man's suppressed emotion, said nothing, but looked at him tenderly.

At last the soldier broke the silence:

"When I stand before the Queen, I feel like a little child, a little child near its mother. My heart overflows with love and devotion, and I feel that, at a sign from her, I could lay down my life, and to spare her grief I could shed my last drop of blood. Oh! that I might wash away forever all trace of tears from her lovely face."

"I understand your feelings and share them," sighed Claire, "but why do you persist in speaking so about giving

up your life? The thought of death seems to fascinate you. Is there nothing in this world that inspires you with a desire to live?"

"Claire, Claire, don't be cruel. You know there is one person I hold infinitely dearer than all the world. Claire, I must speak, I must tell you what I have been holding back so long. My fortune now is within my grasp. Now I can hold my head high, and ask you, beloved . . ."

"Silence, sir, Her Majesty calls!"

"By my star," murmured the Cavalier, "it was just in time. I was about to bare my great secret, which I promised never to mention until the Queen gives her permission."

With these words, Tancrède hurried back into the chamber. He beheld a transfigured Anne. Vigorous determination had restored her royal dignity. Her Spanish blood had awakened in her veins. She was goaded by the humiliations she had endured so many years to fight mercilessly for revenge upon those who had wronged her. She was determined to assume her rightful place.

When the Cavalier approached, the Queen pointed to the parchment on which she had just written in a firm hand the fatal word: *Assentior*. In a trembling voice, she spoke to the young man:

"That frail bit of parchment contains my hopes, nay, my very life. The Duchess of Chevreuse is waiting for it in London. A Queen's safety depends upon its faithful delivery. If it reaches England, I am saved. If the mes-

senger is seized, it means death for him, and for me, ruin. Are you willing to undertake the delivery of this paper in London?"

The Cavalier, without a word, extended his hand.

"Remember, that you will have to cross the half of France, where the Cardinal has filled the country with his spies."

Tancrède made a slightly impatient gesture.

"I shall elude the spies."

"At Artois you will come upon the advance lines of the army in Flanders."

"I shall break through the lines."

"The Channel is carefully guarded. No ship can leave before the passengers are thoroughly searched."

"I shall foil the searchers."

"You will not even be safe in England. Our enemies have men in their pay there who would not even hesitate at assassination."

"I have my sword!"

Anne shuddered. All these dangers crowded into her mind, and she hesitated a moment more. It seemed too terrible to entrust a mere boy with such a perilous duty.

"To accomplish this mission," she said slowly, "you will have to be a miracle of bravery, of audacity, and above all, of prudence."

The Cavalier answered impatiently:

"Give me the packet, Madame. I need no further instructions. In Your Majesty's service I would willingly

go to the end of the world. If I have neither bravery nor audacity, nor prūdence, I can at least offer you my blind devotion. I shall reach England, Madame, or die."

There was a short silence. The Queen, deeply moved, looked at the young man's handsome face, animated by high resolution.

Almost mechanically, she said:

"And how old did you say you were?"

"Sixteen."

The Cavalier, who did not understand what was in the Queen's mind, hastened to add:

"But after all age matters little. A soldier's life hardens the body and matures the mind."

Anne sealed the precious parchment, and then turned her eyes again to the young man. His bearing, his face, his tone of voice, all seemed to fascinate the Queen. The longer she looked at him and listened to him, the deeper became the impression she had felt when he first entered the room. His presence awakened memories long buried in the deepest recesses of her heart. Anne's lips trembled as she mūrmured to herself:

"How he resembles the other!"

But she still struggled against this terrifying obsession.

"It is an illusion. My imagination has tricked me."

Again she took the sealed parchment, and pressed her signet ring upon the soft wax. When at last she spoke, it was in a calm, collected manner.

"So you have already experienced the rough life of a soldier. How long have you been in the army?"

"All my life."

"I suppose you must be the son of an officer?"

"I do not have a father."

The Queen paled slightly, but continued quietly:

"Is it possible? Was your childhood so destitute that you found no refuge except among soldiers? Was there no one to care for you? . . . Your mother . . . ?"

She barely murmured these last two words, as if a sudden pain had overcome her. Breathing quickly, she waited for the youth's answer.

"I have no mother," answered the Cavalier, sadly.

"Is she dead? Did she die when you were born?"

"No, I believe, I hope, madame, that she lives."

Anne suppressed a cry. The slender threads upon which she had clung to assure herself that this was all an illusion were being broken, one by one. But she still tried to force herself to believe it was a mere coincidence. Even if the Cavalier was sixteen years old, hadn't Marie de Chevreuse intimated that "the other" child was probably dead?

Looking more carefully at him, the Queen decided that the illusion came from a resemblance in expression, not in features. Granted that the Cavalier was an orphan, ignorant of his birth, his parents, his family, he could not, *must* not be the other, since the other was dead.

Anne, still trembling, not daring to trust her voice, re-

mained silent. It was the Cavalier who finally spoke:

"Since Your Majesty has been kind enough to take a slight interest in a poor soldier of fortune, I shall venture to tell you everything. I have no protector in this world, and must trust entirely to your kindness.

"What I am about to confess to you, Madame," he continued, blushing deeply, "I would entrust to no other ear. But Your Majesty is so great that all, great or small, are equal in your sight. Madame, neither the name nor the title I bear belongs to me. The Cavalier Tancrède is neither Cavalier nor Tancrède."

"Who then are you?" asked the Queen with suppressed anguish.

"I do not know!"

"And yet you just said you believed your mother was alive. What do you know of her? What makes you think that she would abandon her child, helpless and unprotected?"

"Oh, Madame, please do not accuse her! In all my years of shame and sorrow I have never done so myself. I do not know how I was separated from her, but I feel that she has suffered cruelly all these years. Something tells me my sorrow has been no greater than hers. No, Madame, I have never accused her. I am only very, very sorry for her."

Every word cut deeply into the heart of the sad Queen. Although she still forced herself to believe that this was all coincidence, she no longer considered this child, this

orphan, a stranger, since he had opened his heart to her so sincerely—to her, a mother without a child. In a soft, sympathetic voice, trembling with emotion, Anne spoke:

"Yes, child, you are right. She must have suffered cruelly. If she is at fault, God will allow her to atone for her sin. You must tell me everything. What proof do you have of the existence of this mother, when it seems so probable that she is dead?"

The Cavalier remained silent a moment, his head bowed. He finally spoke in a low, quivering voice:

"A proof? It is a very slight thread I have to depend on, Madame. It is more an inner conviction than a concrete proof. Yet the heart has its thoughts as well as the mind. I did suppose for a long time that she was dead. I thought that I must live my life alone, in complete ignorance of my origin. But one day a ray of light penetrated the darkness of my soul and gave me hope. A death-bed confession revealed a secret, which threw light upon my uncertainties."

"What did you learn? What do you know? Speak!" exclaimed the Queen in a trembling voice. Tancrède, surprised by this sudden emotion, answered sadly:

"Madame, you suffer. This interview has tired you. How I regret having caused Your Majesty this suffering!"

"No, no, speak! I wish to hear all. Speak!"

The Cavalier proceeded to tell in a few, rapid sentences the story of his roving youth. Anne, hanging on every word, heard how the rough trooper was his only guardian,

and how a last-minute confession had given the young man a clue to the mystery of his birth. She trembled as the Cavalier described the hidden enemies who had persecuted him from the day of his arrival in Paris—terrible adversaries, into whose hands had fallen his only hope of proving his identity.

Yet the Queen still hesitated. She could not believe, in spite of the strong evidence of the Cavalier's story, that after sixteen long years this unexpected interview had brought her into the presence of him whom she believed dead. Her heart leaped with joy at the sight of this handsome, brave, loyal youth who so resembled that other person, whose features were engraved forever on her heart. But her mind warned her that this was all coincidence. Her woman's heart yearned to hold this lost child in her arms, and to wipe out with one kiss the loneliness of sixteen years.

But could she? Was she not the Queen? One rash step might cause her to fall from her tottering throne, dishonored, disgraced. Alas, if it was her child, what a fatal moment had he chosen for his return! Now launched in a desperate struggle she must be more cautious, more suspicious than ever before. If the Cavalier had told her the truth, then the proof of his identity was at that moment in the hands of her enemies. What a cruel destiny which brought back to her this precious boy, at a time when he appeared as a menacing personification of her fears, her terrors, her shame.

Guitaut's words now rang in her ears like a prophetic warning. Yes, she must shut her heart, must conquer all her woman's feelings. Her position as Queen demanded this sacrifice. Yet she could not remain longer in doubt, a doubt much more cruel than absolute certainty.

No longer hiding her intense emotion, she now began to question the Cavalier rapidly:

"So your presence in Paris is due to a dying man's confession?"

"Yes, Madame."

"You brought with you secret papers which he had confided to you?"

"I did."

"And they were stolen?"

"Yes, on the day of my arrival."

"Who, do you think, was guilty of the theft?"

The Cavalier shrugged his shoulders slightly.

"Do you have no idea, no suspicion?"

"Yes, Madame, to tell the truth, I do."

"Speak then."

"You will have to pardon my audacity, Madame, when I say that my enemies are known to Your Majesty."

"To me? Whom do you suspect?"

"Your Majesty's enemies."

Anne turned pale.

"How did such a thought ever . . ."

"Allow me to explain, Madame. The papers which I carried were enclosed in a casket."

"A casket!"

"I was instructed to deposit this casket with a person who is one of Your Majesty's attendants."

"Who?"

"The Count Guitaut!"

"Guitaut! But yet how could the Count know where these papers were from, and to whom they were to go?"

"The seal of the casket proved its origin."

"What was the seal?"

"A star of gold."

Anne trembled.

"Its destination," continued Tancrède, "was, apparently to be known by repeating one word. The name of a city, nothing else. When I gave this precious casket to Guitaut I was to say: *'Remember Amiens!'* "

Anne could no longer doubt the truth. It now appeared in its entirety, completely overwhelming her. The casket was Buckingham's, for it bore his seal. And he who stood in front of her was—her son! Her child! Instinctively she opened her arms to receive him and fold him to her bosom. But her strength suddenly failed as she started to rise. Exhausted by her emotions, she fell back in her chair.

Tancrède, terrified, rushed to her. He knelt beside her, scarcely daring to let his hands touch the high princess, so imposing in her majesty—his Queen. The Queen of France.

She soon reopened her eyes.

"Oh, Madame," cried the heart-broken young man, "I beg of you, forgive me!"

"It is nothing," she said, slowly. "I was tired. Your story recalled forgotten memories of past years, and the emotion was too much for me."

"Then I was right? Your Majesty knows the truth?"

"Silence!" she commanded, sadly. "We must not talk of that any more. The hour is late, Cavalier, and it is time for you to leave."

Tancrède bowed his head, crūshed.

"Leave! . . . And never learn the secret which Your Majesty alone can reveal to me!"

"That secret, sweet child, is more mysterious, more weighty, more dangerous than you can possibly imagine. To tell it to you would be to ruin you."

"Am I not ruined if I remain in ignorance of it?"

"It would also ruin . . . another person."

"My mother?"

"Yes, child, your mother, your mother. The hour will come when she can press you to her heart, but she is now threatened by grave dangers."

"By grave dangers! Is that not even a greater reason to let me be near her, to let me give her the support of my sword and of my life?"

"Alas, you can do nothing to save her. Yet you can do everything to ruin her."

"Ruin her, Madame! What do you mean? Do you think that I would come to her with reproaches on my

tongue and hatred in my heart? Never, once, have I thought harshly of her. I do not come to threaten her, or to demand that she give me the rights of a son. I only wish to kneel humbly before her and say:

" 'Mother, here I am, your son whom you thought lost. I love you, and have always cherished in my heart a tender affection for you. If my presence endangers you, say but the word, and I shall retire into the shadow again, never to reappear until you give the command. If you are persecuted by enemies, tell me who they are, and I shall defend you against them.' Do you still think she would repulse me?"

The Queen lowered her eyes before the frank, beseeching gaze of the young man, so full of loyalty and love.

"Be kind to me, Madame. Do not destroy the one hope I have in this world. Do not cast me again into that agonizing abyss of loneliness and shame. Save me by one word."

"Alas, I cannot."

"Madame, let me tell you everything. The loss of this hope would be more cruel and torturing now than ever before. In destroying all my hopes for the future, it would shatter my dearest dream, a dream which is so lovely that I tremble to think of it. Madame, I prize it more than my life. It is a dream of love."

"Of love?"

"Yes, I love the purest, most beautiful, most wonderful

girl whom it has ever fallen to the lot of a soldier and of a gentleman to love."

"Claire!" whispered the Queen.

Then, to herself, she murmured:

"He and Claire love each other!"

"Yes," answered the young man, in a voice soft and sweet, like a prayer. "Let me know who I am that I may face the world without hanging my head. Let me see my mother. Must I remain a stranger to her forever? Have pity. It is terrible to love any one as I love her, yet never to see her face. I might pass her in the street, and not recognize her! Be near her, and yet be alone."

"Cavalier, speak no more. Can you not see how you hurt me, cruel child? You force me to struggle with myself to resist your prayers."

She covered her face with her hands.

"No, I cannot . . . I cannot."

"Only let me see her, even if I cannot come near her and speak to her. She is beautiful, is she not? Since you know her she must be a great lady. You must forgive me, Madame, but I feel that she must be beautiful and sad, like your Majesty."

Anne trembled. The Cavalier's words recalled Guitaut's warning. She must not yield to her emotion—for his sake and for her own.

"I have already told you, Cavalier, that I cannot speak," she said in a cold voice. "It is true, your mother is a great

lady. But ask me no more. A rash word, a rash movement, and she is ruined."

"Very well," said Tancrède, rising. "This time, Madame, I understand. I was mad, yes mad, to believe a great lady would care to recognize a poor soldier like me."

"Cavalier!"

"So, she lives—rich, flattered, happy."

"Alas!"

"After all, what would my reappearance mean to her? Remorse—perhaps dishonor. Yes, she is wise to repulse me. And yet, how I loved her and respected her! What sorrow I felt for her! Even yesterday I thought how sadly she must recall the little babe who was snatched from her. I said over and over again: 'Yes, she waits for you, she has a mother's divine belief that she will see you again.' But that is ended. She lives and does not wish to recognize me. Very good."

"Child, your sorrow makes you unjust."

"Tell her, Madame, when you next see her, that her son . . ."

A sob broke from Tancrède's lips. Anne, desolate, bowed her head.

"Tell her that her son has left on a dangerous mission, in which he risks his life, without having had the supreme consolation of seeing her. But let her not be alarmed. Her peace and security will never be endangered by a single word or a single movement of mine. I swear this on my honor."

"What! Nothing else? Not a word of farewell, of regret, of forgiveness? You are cruel."

"Oh, Madame, I suffer."

"Go then, my child! May God protect you. I pray that you will reach England safely. Go at once to the Duchess of Chevreuse. In case you cannot find her, see Lord Montaigu. They are my friends—and your mother's. After delivering your message, tell them that their sad friend recommends you to their care. Ask them to protect your life and fortune, as she herself can not."

Anne stopped, unable to speak more.

"Madame, how good you are, and how I love you."

"It is not I that you must thank and love. It is she, that mother who weeps for you and who will watch over you henceforward. Farewell, my child!"

The Queen was nearly fainting, and turned her head so as not to see the Cavalier's sad, handsome face. His secret trembled on her lips, ready to escape in a flood of emotion.

"Farewell, then, Madame. Your Majesty may count on my fidelity. I consecrate to you the two things left me in this world—my sword and my life."

Tearing himself from this long and unhappy interview from which he had hoped to gain so much, Tancrède, embittered and disillusioned, rushed out of the Queen's chamber.

Claire waited without. The two retraced their path in silence as far as the *Pont des Amours*—whose name now

seemed a hollow mockery to the poor Cavalier. No one opposed their passage. It was at this moment that Mazarin, believing his trap to have been successful, was about to interview the prisoner.

Now that the time for separation had come, the young man's heart felt as thought it would break. He took the girl's hand reverently, as he said:

"Claire, forgive me . . ."

"Forgive you?" she asked, looking at him in surprise with her beautiful, frank eyes.

"Forgive me, Claire, for ever having dared to raise my eyes to you. I came here tonight a poor soldier, without a name. I leave, still poor, still without a name—and now without hope!"

"But I also am a poor orphan."

"Please forget what I dared to intimate in a moment of madness. I had not the right."

She lowered her eyes, without answering.

"Forgive me, Claire! Forget everything! Farewell!"

The broken-hearted young man fled into the darkness of the night.

Claire slowly raised her eyes. If the Cavalier could have seen her, he would have realized that the lovely girl had given her heart to him, whether he was great or humble, rich or poor.

Her lips said slowly:

"Good-bye!"

CHAPTER XVI

AT *THE PEWTER PLATE*

It struck eleven as Cyrano, after his miraculous escape from Mazarin, at last left the Louvre. It was at that hour that the poet had invited his friends to dine with him at *The Pewter Plate*.

To go from the Louvre to the Porte Saint-Martin he had to cross half of Paris. His route was not a very safe one on a dark night like this. The badly paved streets were unlighted, and he had to be prepared at any moment for some ambush, particularly in the district near the markets. Sinister figures lurked in the darkness, and the brave Gascon kept on the alert for trouble.

On leaving the narrow Rue du Petit-Bourbon, he started to make a short-cut so as to reach the Croix du Trahoir. He could thus escape the labyrinth of little streets near the market-place. However, he had not taken fifteen steps before he suddenly slackened his pace. At the far end of the street he saw a familiar figure coming in his direction.

"Vauselle!" he muttered.

It was, indeed, the noble Sieur de Vauselle, who was

advancing toward the Louvre according to Mazarin's instructions. He carried his head high, with the air of one who realizes that he has just rendered eminent service to the State.

But when he suddenly recognized the man to whom he owed his life, he stopped abruptly, looking about to see if it was too late to turn back. However, all chance of escape was cut off, and the street was too narrow to pass Cyrano unnoticed in the shadow of the houses. He could not avoid him. But he concealed his fear by assuming an insolent air in the hope of carrying off the encounter with a high hand.

The brave poet now knew the part that Vauselle had had in the conspiracy at the Louvre. His blood boiled at the sight of the rascal. He stopped abruptly in front of him, barring further advance.

"Stop, my fine fellow!" he cried sharply, scarcely able to restrain his wrath. "I'd like a word with you."

"Why, by my faith!" exclaimed the other, feigning great surprise; "if it isn't my old friend, Monsieur de Bergerac. To think that I didn't recognize the man who saved my life!"

"Saved your life, yes, *sandious!* And he now asks God's forgiveness for having kept the head of sūch a blackguard from the noose. It would look well on a gibbet!"

"Indeed! Your remarks seem lacking in politeness, this evening."

"Not so strong, scoundrel! Tell me, where are you going so late?"

"Where am I going? You are inquisitive. I reply by asking where you are coming from?"

"I can easily answer that, villain. I have just saved from a trap one whom you expected to ensnare. I routed those cowardly assassins whom you and your devilish master so kindly hid at the Louvre."

"Why, what do you mean?" stammered Vauselle.

"Monsieur de Mazarin will soon give you a more detailed explanation—that is, he will if I don't send you to your other friend, Satan, to get the truth from him."

Vauselle, white as a sheet, retreated a step.

"Come," said Cyrano, roughly, "the time has arrived for you to show whether you've a drop of real blood in your veins. Draw your sword, traitor, and defend yourself. *Sandious*, I'll make you pay for your treachery now. I can settle with your master later."

Vauselle felt the cold chill of death come over him. All was lost—at the moment when he thought fortune was in his grasp. There was nothing he could do. The Louvre was too far away for him to cry for help. He read his irrevocable doom in the Gascon's determined face. He already felt the demon fighter's cold blade sink into his flesh. He had closed his eyes, waiting for the inevitable end, when a sharp cry from Cyrano made him open them again.

"*Mordious!*" cursed the poet, first turning pale and then blushing. "*Mordious!* My sword . . . my sword!"

His hand groped desperately but he felt only a scabbard without a blade.

"Surrendered!" he moaned sadly. "Surrendered to the Musketeer!"

Vauselle's face lighted with a smile of triumph. He realized the truth. He suddenly drew forth his rapier fiercely.

"Very well, you bully," he cried, "I'm ready for you!"

The enraged Cyrano had to restrain himself from rushing on his adversary to choke him, even against a naked blade.

"Very well," he muttered at last, "the devil has saved you once more. But remember, we shall meet again, and then woe betide you!"

Vauselle smiled insolently.

"Thank you so much for the warning. I shall be on my guard."

"It won't be long!" exclaimed Cyrano, threateningly.

"Well, till then. And do try to remember your sword the next time—or else have a better excuse!"

With this final taunt, the Sieur de Vauselle started on a run toward the Loūvre, not caring to face the fiery Cyrano any longer, even if he was unarmed. He muttered to himself as soon as he was at a safe distance:

"I must get rid of that man. That was a close escape. I may not do so well next time. But, after all, Monsieur

de Mazarin has excellent ways of getting rid of embarrassing persons."

Cyrano, in the meantime, continued on his way to *The Pewter Plate*, but at a much slower pace. The slightest unfavorable incident overbalanced the most brilliant triumph in the Gascon's proud, sensitive soul. Thus it was that he now had an unpleasant feeling of defeat. Not that he worried about Vauselle—he knew that he would meet the rascal again and could make him pay for his treachery and his insulting remarks. And, after all, the man was such a coward, it was degrading to run him through with a gentleman's sword. Bodies like his were seen to best advantage swinging from a gibbet.

No, the brave poet was thinking of another adversary—a gentleman and a soldier. Twice within one evening an enemy had had the better of Cyrano de Bergerac. The events of the night had forced him to submit to the most outrageous insults. This d'Artagnan had made remarks about his . . . his . . . Yes, *Dioubibane!* There was no getting around it—*about his nose.* And the man was still alive!

Cyrano had forgotten this mortifying fact until his unexpected meeting with Vauselle had painfully reminded him of it. His sword, a sword that had never tasted defeat—he had given it up in inglorious combat. Surrendered—and to whom? Oh, misery of miseries—to that same cursed Musketeer.

Yes, there could be no doubt that this d'Artagnan was getting on his nerves. Was it written in the Book of

Fate that he should always meet this calm, sardonic man? What was his game, that the Musketeer should on the same evening lay violent hands on him and yet, by a generous lie, save him from imprisonment?

As a fitting climax to all this, d'Artagnan was a Musketeer, and Cyrano a cadet in the Guards—and both were Gascons. Yet the poet hesitated to believe that such a cold, imperturbable man could be a Gascon. In spite of his dislike for the lieutenant, Cyrano had to admit that his enemy handled superbly those two weapons on which he had always prided himself so greatly—his sword and his wit.

"'No nose at all,' *mordious!*" muttered Cyrano to himself. "'No nose at all!' And the villain has my sword! *Capédédi!* Let me once get my hands on him, and I'll settle with him that question of my nose!"

With this threat on his lips, Cyrano turned into the Rue Saint-Honoré, opposite the Croix du Trahoir. At the foot of the cross stood a man who, when he saw him, started to walk toward him. At the same time a warm, mellow voice broke the quiet of the evening:

"At last, sir, there you are! I have searched for you for more than half an hour."

The poet nearly choked. This was too much. The man who had spoken was d'Artagnan. The Musketeer continued, calmly:

"But for a happy chance, I should probably have spent the night looking for you. But, thank God, I saw Mon-

sieūr de Vauselle who told me that somebody answering to your description was on his way toward this square."

"What do you desire this time?" interrupted Cyrano, reaching instinctively for the sword that, alas, was not there.

"To return this to you!" answered d'Artagnan, drawing from beneath his cloak a long, sharp blade that gleamed brightly in the darkness.

"My sword!" exclaimed Cyrano.

"Take it, sir, I do not wish to keep a trophy obtained without fighting."

The poet, overwhelmed by this unexpected act, could not speak for several moments. He felt an emotion of joy at regaining his sword, and one of resentment at being reminded of its inglorious surrender earlier in the evening.

"*Sandious!*" he finally said. "That was well done. You have taken a load off my mind. I accept the return of the sword. But it has received an insult this evening which will not be wiped away until it has crossed with yours."

D'Artagnan smiled. This impetuosity seemed rather familiar to the Musketeer, who thought of his younger days. He replied, bowing politely:

"Just as you say, sir. I believe we are likely to meet again."

"Apparently."

"That fate which has placed us face to face twice already will undoubtedly arrange a third meeting."

"Three follows two."

"Let us then await this next occasion."

"Can we not advance it?"

D'Artagnan put a finger to his lips.

"You forget, sir, that we are in the King's service, and that all formal duelling is strictly forbidden."

"I did not think that the famous Monsieur d'Artagnan would be so interested in edicts against duelling."

"The proverb says that it is never too late to mend."

"Doesn't it also say that the devil turns hermit?"

"Which means . . . ?"

"That the King's Musketeer is now in the Cardinal's pay."

D'Artagnan bit his lips, touched to the quick by this insulting sarcasm.

"Let's stop this now," he said dryly. "We shall meet again before long."

"Then you will deign to recognize me?"

"Why not?"

"Well, hmm . . . this evening, you seemed to have some difficulty in remembering me."

D'Artagnan could not help smiling as he recalled the amusement he had had at the poet's expense.

"Don't let that worry you," he said, "I won't have the same reasons for forgetting next time."

The poet made a gesture of impatience, but the Musketeer, still preserving his calm manner, cut him short.

"Come, sir, it is time we separated. You have had

enough adventures for one evening, and, if my memory does not deceive me, you have some friends waiting for you."

The two men separated going in opposite directions without a further word. As Cyrano passed Saint-Eustache, the clock struck midnight.

"*Sandious!*" he grumbled. "The Musketeer was right, as usual! My honest friends will be dying of anxiety and impatience. And, *milledious,* I had forgotten about Mademoiselle Minou! Savinien, you are keeping a beautiful woman waiting—at your first rendez-vous! Oh, for shame!"

Spurred on by the thought, he rushed along the Rue Montorgueil, and soon reached *The Pewter Plate.* He entered the famous old inn, threw his cloak into the hands of the host, and, without waiting to catch his breath, exclaimed:

"Well, here I am. I'm as hungry as ten men, so bring up dinner as soon as you can. We must make up for lost time."

The host, mouth wide open, stared fixedly at the poet.

"What the devil is wrong, my good man! Don't you know me?"

"Yes, I do," gasped the inn-keeper, "but, but, yes . . . you are Monsieur de Bergerac, aren't you?"

"Who did you think I was?"

"Well I . . . I . . . forgive me, sir, I thought you were . . ."

The man finished the sentence with a vague wave of his arms.

"You thought me what?"

"Dead!" answered the other, humbly.

Cyrano jumped back in amazement. The host hastened to explain:

"Those two gentlemen, the big and the little one . . ."

"Saint-Amant and Linières."

"They waited for a long, long time. They were dying of nervousness. Oh, it was pathetic to see it!"

"Noble friends!"

"As the time passed by, they began to despair. They decided finally that your body had fallen lifeless on the field of battle. The last time I went upstairs they were weeping like two children."

"What tender-hearted friends. I must hasten to relieve them of this anxiety."

"One minute, sir. A lady came . . ."

"Mademoiselle Minou!"

"But when she found that you weren't here, she flew into a temper."

The lover turned pale.

"A fury, sir; she was a veritable fury. You would hardly recognize her."

"Well, then what?" stammered the unhappy poet.

"She went away, banging the door, and leaving this note addressed to you."

"Let me see it."

Cyrano tried to hide his anxiety as he unfolded the letter. The hand-writing betrayed the anger of the young actress. He read:

Monsieur de Bergerac: you delight in keeping people waiting. You should know that a real lover is only interested in serving her whom he loves.

"Oh, I can explain all that easily enough," he remarked. He continued with the note:

Personally, I detest cold suppers. Farewell, then! Love has but one moment, and you have missed it. Admit, my fine lover, that you would have done better if your devotion had been as long as . . .

The poet stopped, thunderstruck. He looked again and again at the words.

"As . . . as what?" he gasped. There could be no doubt. There were the words, scrawled in an impatient hand.

. . . had been as long as your nose!

"*Tripedédiou!*" exclaimed Cyrano. "This is my lucky day!"

The heart-broken poet looked again nervously at the impertinent note.

"Bah!" he finally remarked, calm once again. "A woman's revenge! What difference does it make! Come, I'll forget all this after a good dinner."

"But . . ." objected the host.

"Well, what now? The gentlemen at least, remained?"

"Oh, yes! But, as it was getting late and their sorrow had unnerved them, I thought it best to serve the dinner."

"What the devil!"

Cyrano did not wait to hear more, but rushed up the stairs, four steps at a time, the trembling host following after. Opening the door of the dining-room, the poet stopped short to survey the extraordinary scene. The huge Saint-Amant had collapsed in a large arm-chair, his face lighted with a smile of contentment. Linières, his red nose shining like a beacon, slept with his head on the table, a half-empty bottle clutched triumphantly in his hands. His face was still wet with the tears he had shed. It was clear that the two boon companions had done more than ample justice to the famous cuisine and cellar of *The Pewter Plate.*

Cyrano rapidly surveyed this scene of devastation. Seeing nothing but dirty plates and empty bottles, he raised his arms to heaven and cried:

"Nothing! They have left nothing!"

"Oh, yes, they have," whispered the host.

"Thank heavens! What is it?"

"This!"

The worthy inn-keeper, with a most ingratiating smile, handed Cyrano the bill. Never had the poet felt himself so in need of all his philosophy. Stoically he paid the bill.

But suddenly a plan of revenge came into his head, and he wrote hastily on the back of the bill:

De profundis clamavi ad vos, Dominio!
Lugere . . . amici . . . defunctus . . . Cyrano!

He left the bill on the table, and then rushed out of the room. At the foot of the stairs, however, he stopped as a loud cry of lamentation came from the upper room.

"Saint-Amant! Saint-Amant!" wailed the shrill voice of Linières. "Wake up!"

The giant only groaned.

"Cyrano is defunct—dead!" gasped the maudlin drinker.

"Dead! *Palsambleuf!* What are you saying?"

"Read it yourself!"

The voice of the host explained in a tone of affected pity:

"Poor Monsieur de Bergerac fell in an ambush. Twenty brigands were waiting to cut his throat . . ."

"Well, well," thought Cyrano, laughing to himself, "our host has a fine sense of humor."

"Only twenty of them?" asked Saint-Amant. "Then let me go to sleep again. Monsieur de Bergerac is alive. I'm sorry for the poor rascals, though—only twenty of them!"

But Linières remained obstinate. With the complacent insistence of a drunkard, he exclaimed, weeping:

"Oh, Thomas, why do you doubt? He must be dead, because he's written it here himself."

A loud burst of laughter deep and mirthful interrupted him.

"You fool! Savinien dead! Ha, ha, ha! Our Gascon dead! Ha, ha! Why he's just played a trick on us. Ha, ha!"

Cyrano did not wait to hear more. Saint-Amant's hilarity was contagious, and the Gascon was still laughing as he climbed the stairs to his room at *The White Sheep*. He opened the door, but stopped on the threshold. There was some one else in the room. Suddenly a voice called out:

"Cyrano!"

"Tancrède, Cavalier!" he cried, opening his arms to enfold the youth.

Neither spoke for several moments. The memory of dangers just escaped and dangers to come drove from Cyrano's mind all thought of the recent episode. As he looked at the handsome face and sad eyes of his young friend, his throat ached, and he could hardly keep his voice steady.

"Now," he said, severely, "sit down. We must have a talk."

CHAPTER XVII

CYRANO, THE MAGICIAN

THE Cavalier, realizing that a long-delayed scolding was about to begin, settled comfortably in his chair. He had the humble air of a school-boy who had been disobedient and was now about to be reprimanded by his teacher.

The poet had prepared a formidable lecture for his incorrigible young friend, a long discourse, stressing the dangers of intrigue and politics. He had given great care to the peroration, in which he intended to beg his friend in the name of Wisdom and Friendship to abandon the perilous course upon which he had embarked.

But, alas, Cyrano was not half through before the Cavalier, overcome by fatigue, fell sound asleep.

"Oh, well," he said, talking confidentially to the wall, "what's the use of trying to put sense into the young rascal's head! You give him advice, and he laughs at you. You think you finally hold him, and he slips through your fingers. You scold him, and he goes to sleep!"

Frowning deeply, he looked again at the culprit. But little by little his face cleared, and a smile appeared on his lips.

"What a foolish time I chose for my lecture. The poor boy is worn out by fatigue and excitement. Let him sleep Tomorrow is another day."

With a mother's tenderness, the noble Gascon took the sleeping Cavalier in his arms, and placed him gently on the cot. The young soldier slept soundly. Cyrano then sank into a chair near the window, and stretched out his long legs on a little stool. The poet remained awake for a long time, meditating in the moonlight. Finally he sank into a heavy sleep and dreamt confusedly of Vauselle, d'Artagnan, the Cavalier, and Mademoiselle Minou.

When Tancrède awoke the next morning, he saw his host setting the table for what appeared to be a substantial meal. Cyrano had risen early, and brought in from a neighboring shop provisions for a tempting breakfast. The poet thought that after his refreshing sleep, the Cavalier would be able to do justice to a hearty meal.

"Cyrano," said the Cavalier, stretching himself comfortably, "did I fall asleep while you were talking to me last night?"

"Yes, I think that's an accurate description of what you did," answered the Gascon, half amused, half angry.

"You must forgive me, but I was terribly tired."

"Very well, you're forgiven. Now sit down and have a bite to eat."

"You don't have to ask me twice," said Tancrède, quickly seating himself at the table. "I'm as hungry as a lion! It's all very fine to travel the broad highway, excellent for

your health! The only trouble is that one dines too often in imagination, and sleeps under the stars."

The poet, although fully engaged with carving his fowl, decided to strike while the iron was hot.

"Is that so?" he said, innocently. "Yet they say there are pleasant little inns on the Eastern Post Road. What the devil is the name of the one I heard about the other day? It's at Coulommiers. . . . Oh, yes, *The Shield of France*, if I'm not mistaken. They say one finds excellent entertainment there."

The Cavalier looked up in astonishment.

"What? *The Shield of France?* You know about that?"

"I know everything!"

Cyrano pronounced these words in a sonorous, impressive voice. The Cavalier, fearing that the lecture was about to begin again, hastened to busy himself with a drumstick.

"So that is the way you treat a worthy friar! *Ventrebiou*, a holy man, in His Eminence's service! Trussed up like a sausage! *Corbac*, that's serious, very serious!"

Then suddenly changing from his grave manner, Cyrano burst out in a loud laugh, and slapped the Cavalier on the back.

"You rascal, you're incorrigible! Come, for your penance you'll have to tell me the whole story!"

Tancrède interrupted his massacre of the chicken to tell of his riotous adventure with the Capuchin. When he

mentioned Vauselle's name, the poet scowled fiercely. He muttered vague threats which seemed to intimate the pleasure he would have in cutting a certain rascal's ears off.

"Why, do you know him!" exclaimed Tancrède.

"Young man, once and for all I want you to get this into your head: I know everything!"

"In that case you might be good enough to tell me what the gentleman did with my horse."

"What horse?"

"A noble beast! The prize of the Duchess' stables. The great lady gave it to me, and this Vauselle borrowed it in a manner somewhat . . . cavalier."

"You were fond of this horse?"

"Was I fond of it! It was priceless! And you never saw such intelligence!"

"Wait a minute. Was its name *Capitan?*"

Tancrède gaped in astonishment.

"Good heavens! You've become a magician!"

"The truth is, as I said before, I know everything."

"By my star! Well, this saves all superfluous explanations on my part. Since you've become a sorcerer, you might find this precious animal for me."

"Would that please you?"

"*Parbleu!* It would. I shall need him very soon."

"Cavalier, I simply can't refuse you anything. Your wish shall be fulfilled."

Cyrano rose from the table, and walked toward the win-

dow. The stupefied young man looked at him, fascinated. He expected to see the poet make mysterious signs in the air and mutter words of enchantment. He would not have been sūrprised if *Capitan*, bridled and saddled, had appeared at the window.

But it did not happen thus. Cyrano, doubtless through modesty, did not wish to frighten the youth with his occult powers. He leaned oūt the window, at the very moment that Master Coquillart was walking across the yard.

"Hallo!" cried the poet. "Has *Capitan* been fed this morning?"

A voice answered from below:

"Yes, monsieur! But the devil seems to have got into the horse. He balks and frets so that we can't come near him."

Cyrano, with the same imperturbable manner closed the window, and returned to the table. In a casual tone of voice, he said:

"You see *Capitan* knows you've returned."

The Cavalier stared as if bewitched.

"This is too much! I'm away for a month, and when I return, you know everything I've done. Not only that, but my lost horse is in your stable!"

"Oh, that's nothing. I know much more about you."

"Sūch as?"

"Oh, nothing, nothing. Let's eat and drink. That's the wisest move."

"In truth you are a strange person. Brave and true as

steel when there is no question of what you call politics . . ."

Cyrano coughed.

"But before the slightest breath of intrigue, you begin to fear and imagine all sorts of deep conspiracies and plots!"

Tancrède laughed joyously.

"For instance, if I had followed your advice I should not have kept my appointment last night. And yet, on my honor, there was not the slightest suspicion of danger."

Cyrano seemed to be bothered by his throat, and coughed several times.

"Really?" he said at last.

"No, and do you remember all the prophecies? Ha, ha!"

"Oh, well, let's not worry about that. One can't always be right, they say."

"Admit that your imagination again ran away with you!"

Cyrano held up to his eye a glass of sparkling wine.

"How do you like my Vouvray?" he asked.

"Come, won't you admit . . ."

"The ham is good, don't you think?"

"Oh, confound you!"

"You're neither eating nor drinking. Here's to your health, Catiline!"

"And to yours, Minerva!"

The discussion ended with a merry clink of glasses.

CHAPTER XVIII

CYRANO, THE CONSPIRATOR

When the two companions had finished their hearty meal, Cyrano, leaning on the table, looked searchingly at his friend:

"Now, let's be serious. What are your plans?"

The young man's face lost its smile. This question brought him back to the present, which he had forgotten during the meal.

"Come, answer me. What are your plans?"

"My plans are simple. I am going to leave."

"Again?"

"Yes, as soon as possible."

"I hope it is not a new conspiracy?"

The Cavalier made a vague gesture.

"Why, zounds, lad, you're just out of one scrape. Don't get into another."

Tancrède did not reply. His face, usually so frank, assumed that enigmatic look which Cyrano was beginning to recognize. The poet realized that threats would not affect the stubborn young soldier. He knew how reserved

his friend became whenever he felt that his honor was concerned.

"Very well," he said, pretending to be uninterested. "When do you leave?"

"This evening."

"Right! Will the trip be long?"

"I don't know—I go to England."

"A matter of two weeks, perhaps three."

The Cavalier suddenly changed his passive manner.

"Cyrano," he said, "I must tell you the truth. You have been so kind and loyal to me, a mere stranger, and I must seem to you so ungrateful. Ever since the day we met by chance, I have caused you trouble and anxiety."

Cyrano made a gesture of protest.

"Who knows, little one, perhaps that's one of the reasons why I am so devoted to you."

"And I am devoted to you. It breaks my heart to leave you—you who are almost the only person in the world who has ever shown affection for me."

"Then, lad, why do you leave me?"

"Because I must. I have made a promise, on oath. I have a sacred mission to fulfil. Alas, what so overwhelms me is that I do not know when I shall return. I may never see you again."

"What's that? Never?" exclaimed the poet. "What do you mean—never? Have you abandoned all hopes for your fortune?"

"My fortune! Alas, there is no such thing!"

"You will not give up at the first set-back?"

"Oh, no, it's not that. But at present I can do nothing. I have promised."

"And the casket?"

"Shh! It mustn't be mentioned again."

"Why not? Didn't you say yesterday that your entire future depended on that interview? Were you deceiving me? I thought you attached great importance to those papers you were trying to recover."

Tancrède bowed his head, and sighed.

"Young one," continued Cyrano in a tone of exquisite tenderness, "have you renounced that hope?"

"Yes," replied the youth, crushed. "I've come to the end. A few ashes, a memory—that is all that's left of my hopes and dreams."

The poet, deeply moved by these sad words, could say nothing. The youth had brought back only a tragic disillusionment from that interview for which he had risked his life.

"Do you now see why I am leaving—with no hope of ever returning to this place, and to my one friend?"

Cyrano pressed his hand affectionately.

"So it's all decided! Yoū are faring forth again, this time to England?"

"Yes, my plans are made."

"The journey will be a dangerous one?"

"Yes, I think so."

"Your mission is weighty, important?"

"The life of a sacred personage depends on it."

"You go alone, I suppose?"

"Yes, of course."

"You might be captured. Had you thought of that?"

"I'll try not to be."

"And if you are?"

"God must help me."

"My child, your fatalism shows courage, but is of little value. Think the matter over a bit. If your star forsakes you, what happens to your mission? Who will carry out your sacred duty?"

The young man was not at all disturbed by the question.

"*Parbleu!* You can do anything with care."

"Which is an absurd statement!" remarked the Gascon abruptly. Cyrano suddenly seemed to have reached a decision, for he continued in a determined voice:

"Tancrède, you shall not go . . ."

"Cyrano, you will surely not try to prevent me."

"Stop, not so fast! Let me finish. No, I can't let you go like that."

"What's to be done?"

The poet arose and placed his hands on the Cavalier's shoulders.

"It's perfectly simple. You shall not go alone because Cyrano de Bergerac will go with you!"

"You!" exclaimed Tancrède in amazement.

"I!"

With a casual air he then continued:

"You see, my physician has been for some time recommending a change of air. If I'm alone here I'll be bored and restless. Also, I've had my own little troubles during these last weeks. Yes, the country air will do me good."

"Oh, thank you, dear old Cyrano, thank you a thousand times. You're too wonderful! So you really will accompany me?"

"That is my decision."

"You're sure you're not afraid of politics?" asked the young man, smiling through the tears he could no longer restrain.

"Politics? I'm beginning to think God made me a master politician!" grumbled the poet.

Tancrède's enthusiasm became uncontrollable. Nothing could now prevent the success of his mission. But Cyrano did not share his enthusiasm. He knew, only too well, what implacable, fiendish adversaries opposed them.

The Cavalier, more and more enthusiastic, cried out:

"We'll leave tomorrow at dawn—together!"

"No, not together!"

The young man looked at him, incredulous.

"Why not together?"

"Hear me now. I have good reason to believe that this house is carefully watched."

"Oh, nonsense! Since when?"

"Since the first night."

"Why? It's possible that they might suspect me of being a dangerous conspirator. But you—such a staunch supporter of the Cardinal, so obedient to all authority!"

"Don't joke. I am probably better known to them and more carefully watched than even you."

"The devil, you say! What's happened?"

"Oh, that's my affair. Tell me one thing. What time did you come here last evening?"

"As soon as I left the Louvre, before eleven."

"You went straight up to my room?"

"Yes, and wondered whether you were never coming."

"Did anything out of the ordinary happen before I arrived?"

"No, nothing. Oh, yes, about midnight something happened. I heard steps on the stairs, and looked out, thinking it was you. A complete mistake—it was a woman!"

"A woman?"

"Yes, a brunette, pretty as the devil, as far as I could see in the dark; but then she was well muffled up."

Cyrano sighed.

"Yes, I know her, alas! You did not see each other, I hope?"

"No! *Mordieu*, what's all this mystery about?"

"Good, no one suspects your presence here. Now listen carefully to our plan of action. In the morning at daybreak I'll leave first, quite openly. If there's a spy about, he'll be sure to dog my steps."

"But that's risking yourself . . ."

"*Sandious*, let me speak! Well, in that way we'll get rid of any spies, and the ground will be clear for you. You will take *Capitan*—he'll be all saddled and ready for you in the stable."

"And you . . . ?"

"Keep quiet! You're to reach the country as soon as you can. In the meantime I'll be leading any possible spies a merry chase, and will finally cut across to Chantilly and meet you there."

Tancrède listened to this plan impatiently.

"By my star! I don't like the way you take all the danger upon yourself. You're risking your life for me."

"Why not?"

"I refuse to accept such a sacrifice."

"It's too late to refuse."

Tancrède understood. He began to realize that there was hidden meaning in his friend's words. The valiant Gascon must have become deeply involved in this affair in some manner unknown to him. He must no longer oppose Cyrano's plans. In a flood of gratitude he seized the poet's hand, and pressed it warmly as a sign of his acquiescence and appreciation.

"Good, we understand each other!" said Cyrano, deeply touched. "I must leave you now."

"Leave me?"

"*Parbleu!* Don't I have to equip myself? *Capitan* is my only horse. Do you expect me to walk from here to London? A journey to the Faubourg Saint-Marceau

will enable me to purchase everything I need. I shall act ostentatiously, like a man who is preparing to take a long trip. That will give the spies something to think about, and will keep them from prowling around here."

"There can be no question that you are a master hand when it comes to intrigue!"

"*Mordious*, no more of that, young man. Do you wish to make me lose my temper?"

Cyrano made his preparations for departure and before leaving, turned to the Cavalier:

"You'll find books here, foils, and, in this box, bottles, cards and dice. You can amuse yourself with them, but don't put your nose outside the door."

"Rest assured."

"Take no chances! If anyone knocks, refuse to open. If anyone calls, turn a deaf ear. I'll return at dusk."

"Very well! Till this evening, Cyrano."

The young man had already settled comfortably in a chair, and was looking at the gay pictures in a hunting book.

As soon as he left the house, Cyrano realized that his suspicions were justified. Opposite *The White Sheep* a man, dressed like a pedlar, was seated on a stone. At sight of the poet, he began to examine the sky attentively. Cyrano smiled and started toward the Quai de la Ferraille. Arriving there, he entered a little shop, and made several purchases: a dark green riding habit, boots, and a pair of

silver-mounted pistols. He took his time with these purchases, examining a good many different materials for his suit, and testing the pistols with an expert eye. The pedlar who had followed him, observed Cyrano out of the corner of his eye, while pretending to watch the river below.

Finally the poet came out with his purchases, and crossed over the Notre Dame bridge. The pedlar seemed to have affairs that drew him in the same direction, for he followed at a discreet distance. The Gascon walked along at a steady pace, not seeming to be aware that his footsteps were dogged. On reaching the Maubert gate, he turned up the Rue Saint-Victor as far as the gate, and, leaving the city, continued on to the Faubourg Saint-Marceau. As he walked straight on, never turning around, the pedlar lessened the gap between them, and followed on his very heels.

The street stretched on before them, past the terrace of the Jardin des Plantes Médicinales as far as the Croix de Clamar. The two walked on at their steady pace until finally they reached the square which marked the boundary line between city and country. Here, in a large field, was the horse-market. Cyrano walked slowly from stall to stall while the grooms exhibited their horses. He finally decided upon a fine Spanish horse with clean-cut legs and a glossy, chestnut coat.

"He's perfect!" he said to himself. "His color will

go well with that of *Capitan*, who is black with a white patch on his forehead. I'll name the animal *Stello* in honor of the Cavalier's famous star."

The Gascon after a trial, finding the horse satisfactory, purchased him. At a near-by saddler's he obtained the necessary trappings, putting the pistols in the holsters, and the suit in the little saddle bag. Then, mounting, Cyrano was ready for any adventure or battle that might come his way. He looked about him before leaving.

"Let's see where my companion is. Ah, busily engaged in conversation with the groom. Of course, he's asked no questions about me! He hasn't even noticed my presence! But, I'll wager he won't have breath left to talk to anyone after *Stello* has done a little trotting!"

His expectations were fully realized. The pedlar abruptly left the groom, and started after Cyrano. The man, realizing what he might have ahead of him, had taken off his coat.

"A wise precaution!" thought Cyrano smiling. "We'll see if we can't set him a pace."

He touched *Stello* with the spurs, and the horse started off at a smart trot. The Gascon had the pleasure of listening to a panting breath ten steps behind him. When he judged that the pedlar had been punished enough, he returned to the city at a walk. He then journeyed in zigzag course up one street and down another from one end of the city to the other. After all, he was leaving Paris for some time, and had to say farewell to his many friends.

Everywhere *Stello* was greatly admired. From time to time Cyrano was asked about the man who was sweating and puffing behind him so pitifully. But when they pointed to the pedlar across the street, Cyrano would answer carelessly:

"Oh, it's nobody—just a man Monsieur de Mazarin was kind enough to send for my protection."

His friends marvelled at the Gascon's change of luck, since he was leaving on a mysterious trip under such powerful protection.

Cyrano finally returned to the Rue Grénetail. It was about time, for the poor spy's tongue was hanging out of his mouth and he could hardly stand up. As the poet gave *Stello* over to Master Coquillart's care, he commanded in a loud voice that the horse be ready at dawn the next morning.

The spy breathed a sigh of relief, and walked off toward the Rue Saint-Martin. Entering a small house, he went into a little back room. There he found a tall man with a cat-like moustache.

"What have you learned?" asked the latter.

"He's getting ready for a quick departure."

"When?"

"Tomorrow, at daybreak."

"Good! Is our man alone?"

"I saw no one else."

"Does he suspect anything?"

"Nothing."

"The fool! Yes, that sounds like him."

"The Cavalier apparently is in hiding somewhere outside the city, and the long-nosed man will meet him tomorrow."

"Very good, very good! We've only to follow the poet and we'll at last have the Mysterious Cavalier."

The smile with which he greeted this remark showed his wolf's teeth.

"Am I free now?" asked the spy, anxiously.

"Yes, there will be nothing else tonight. Or, if anything should happen, my dear sister will warn me!"

With these words the Sieur de Vauselle left the room and hastened to join his master. He rubbed his hands gleefully, overjoyed by the success of his plans and by the thought of the prize they would seize in the morning.

The first skirmish in his campaign against the enemy successfully finished, Cyrano returned to his room. He was anxious to reassure the Cavalier and to put an end to the solitary confinement to which he had subjected the young man. He found him seated peacefully near the window, his handsome head silhouetted by the light of the fading day. The young man, profoundly absorbed, did not hear his friend enter. The Gascon, approaching him, suddenly stopped, amazed.

"*Mordious!*" he cried. "What are you doing? Have you turned dressmaker?"

Tancrède, needle in hand, was sewing. He raised his head and answered calmly:

"You see, I am mending my hat."

"What's wrong with it?"

"Shh!"

With a finger on his lips, the Cavalier showed the astonished poet a piece of parchment which he was sewing into the brim of his hat.

"If I'm ever in danger of being captured, I can throw my hat, containing the precious document, into the nearest bush."

"Oh, I see. Yes, you are wise."

Cyrano did not breathe another word until this important operation was finished.

"At last!" he sighed when Tancrède had completed his task. "You must tell me now what sort of day you had."

"Oh, splendid!"

"I trust you followed my instructions faithfully?"

"To the letter."

"You let no one in?"

"Not a man."

The poet sighed, greatly relieved.

"And you weren't bored all by yourself?"

"A little at first," confessed Tancrède. "But I was soon pleasantly distracted."

"Really! What happened?"

The Cavalier approached his friend, and whispered in his ear:

"The pretty brunette . . ."

The Gascon jumped back.

"The one I saw that night from a distance . . ."

"Well?"

"She's a lot better when you see her in the light. My friend, she's a marvel!"

"Cavalier!"

"Now, now, no false modesty. You're not to pretend you haven't seen her?"

"But how did you see her?"

"You mean, how could I help seeing her. Her window is opposite ours."

Cyrano bowed his head to hide his uneasiness.

"I was sitting there calm and peaceful, reading a book about heraldry. Suddenly I heard the sound of a beautiful voice. I looked out the window and beheld the singer."

"Then what happened?"

"Don't be so excited. By a strange coincidence, at that very moment she looked in my direction. Our eyes met, and I smiled."

"And she?"

Tancrède burst into a laugh.

"Oh, don't be alarmed again! Do you think she is a spy? On the contrary she's just a charming, innocent girl."

Cyrano, still uneasy and annoyed that his instructions had not been carried out, shook his head doubtfully.

"Listen, my friend," continued the Cavalier, "I must tell you everything. The girl confided all her secrets to

me. Well, you're progressing there better than you think."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, it's true! In spite of some unpleasant little incident which she didn't explain, she sees you with a friendly eye. Well, after she had thus given me her confidence, I felt that I must in turn confide in her."

"Out with it! What did you do?"

"Nothing but what you might expect. Last night, overwhelmed and heart-broken by certain unfortunate event, I left a friend of mine too . . . too coldly. Since then I have been thinking. On the eve of a long separation, could I leave her in this cruel uncertainty?"

"Be quick, don't waste so many words!" exclaimed the poet, agonized by the turn of events.

"You see, I wrote a letter to her, hoping that some way might be found to send it to her."

"I understand now. You gave it to Mademoiselle Minou?"

"Could I have found a better messenger? She apparently has friends in the Louvre."

"*Pardios!* I don't doubt that!" moaned Cyrano, before whom arose the unpleasant figure of Vauselle.

"Have I done wrong?"

This innocent, frank question disarmed the poet. He realized the uselessness of scolding, and, controlling his rising anger, answered evasively:

"Let's hope not."

"Well, anyway, the die is cast. She ought to be on her way with the answer."

"Where is she to bring it?"

"Here!"

"What—she, she is coming here!"

This news caused Cyrano to pace the floor anxiously. The truth is that another emotion was added to his alarms and fears. The thought of the girl's appearance caused him as much joy as apprehension, as much secret satisfaction as obvious alarm. Little by little a more pleasant emotion drove out these disturbing ones. And the sight of the abashed Tancrède, looking at him guiltily, sufficed to make him change his attitude.

"Come, boy, when all is said and done you may be right. The young girl is incapable of treachery. So, before we leave, we'll both have settled matters of great importance —to our hearts."

The two friends now resumed their usual care-free manner. With gay hearts and tranquil minds, they sat down at the table. A good supper helped to banish their gloom and worry. Master Coquillart had opened his finest wine, and the gallant friends did justice to it. It was getting late. Our two comrades continued their chatting and laughing. Mademoiselle Minou was late in returning. But after all, she had probably had some difficulty in entering the Louvre.

Cyrano, even while talking, seemed somewhat distracted, and listened carefully for the slightest sound. The con-

versation gradually flagged. The Cavalier passed from the greatest hilarity to complete silence in a short while. He suddenly arose from the table, saying:

"Cyrano, my head feels heavy. A little rest will do me good. I must be wide awake when that precious message comes."

"There's no reason why you shouldn't sleep. I'll call you at the proper time."

CHAPTER XIX

MADEMOISELLE MINOU

CYRANO welcomed the chance to be left to his thoughts.

"Lie down and sleep," he said to the Cavalier, pointing to the bed.

"There? No, my friend. *Non bis in idem.*"

"What do you mean by that?"

"Last night you gave me your bed and slept heaven knows where. Now it's your turn to be comfortable and I will sleep somewhere else."

The young man had already taken off his cloak.

"With your kind permission, I'll sleep on the floor."

"Never! Shall I let my guest sleep on the floor while I repose on a feather bed?"

"I insist that I have my way tonight."

"Cavalier, you make me angry."

"Be as angry as you like, but sleep comfortably."

"Stubborn! will you listen to me! If you scorn my bed, then, on the word of a Bergerac, I refuse to use it. *Dioubibane,* if you sleep on the floor, I will too."

The Cavalier had already closed his eyes. He yawned as he answered:

"Then the bed will remain empty."

"There's nothing you can do with such stubbornness," sighed the kind poet. Returning to the table, he poured himself another glass of wine. He then waited in silence the return of the Cavalier's messenger.

The minutes seemed hours. Cyrano began to be impatient, and vague anxieties seized him. Although he understood from the Cavalier's words that the pretty actress now repented her rude note, the Gascon could not altogether forgive the insult. And, moreover, this repentance came with suspicious abruptness. He could never forget that the girl was Vauselle's sister. He felt that she was incapable of betraying the confiding Cavalier, but she might have met her dastardly brother at the Louvre, and let him inveigle the secret from her. What terrible consequences would follow the slightest indiscretion!

His impatience was beginning to turn into actual alarm when he suddenly heard a soft knock at the door. He sprang up and opened it. Mademoiselle Minou was there, smiling and blushing with the most engaging innocence. Cyrano looked at her without moving, his heart beating as if it would burst, his hands icy cold.

"You?" stammered the poet. "You . . . you . . . ?"

He had strength neither for a gallant word of welcome nor for a reproach. The girl seemed entirely unruffled by this greeting, and in a soft voice whose accents thrilled poor Cyrano's heart, said:

"Excuse me if I have kept you waiting. But you know

by experience that it's much easier to enter the Louvre than to leave it."

This illusion to recent incidents aroused the poet's suspicions. And yet, he felt them unjustified as he looked at the lovely, innocent face before him.

"Were you able to see Mademoiselle de Cernay?"

"Yes, I saw her."

"Was she alone?"

The brunette nodded her head.

"No one suspects your mission?"

"Who could know it?"

The poet lowered his eyes before the girl's candid look. He did not dare pronounce Vauselle's name, which quivered on his lips. Mademoiselle Minou carefully took from her bag a piece of paper, folded into a small square.

"Here is the reply," she said. "But . . . where's your friend?"

She searched the shadows of the room anxiously.

"There he is," replied Cyrano, pointing to a dark mass on the floor, "rolled up in his cavalry cloak."

Mademoiselle Minou seemed reassured:

"Ah! What a heavy sleeper!"

"Don't wake him up just yet, for this gives us a chance for a few words. There are some explanations which . . ."

"Oh, why bother with them?" asked the pretty girl, looking at Cyrano steadily.

"I owe you an apology for . . ."

"Don't speak of it. It is forgotten, as you see, because here I am."

"But you were angry enough to leave me a message that . . ."

Again she interrupted him.

"Oh, don't think of that."

Cyrano, disconcerted, was silent. In her sweeping generosity, Mademoiselle Minou refused to remember anything—either Cyrano's supposed misconduct, or her own cruel revenge.

"Come," she said, "let us make peace. Forgive and forget! We won't mention the past again. Tonight I am a messenger."

"Only that?"

"Well, primarily that. Here is Mlle. Cernay's reply. Really, the boy's taste is not bad. She's charming, with her blue eyes and her pale, gold hair . . ."

"Bah!" said Cyrano, "but a blonde!"

She acknowledged the implied compliment with a pretty blush and a smile that made Cyrano wish to pursue his advantage further. Mlle. Minou seemed to sense the danger and took refuge in an examination of the table where the wine bottles stood.

"Ah!" she said. "With what patience you have awaited my coming! What is the wine?"

"Maraschino."

She took a glass and held it toward the poet, who gallantly poured for her some of the sparkling wine. The Gascon began again warmly:

"But a girl of the blonde type, so pale and insipid, can you imagine any one really loving her?"

"Are you so fastidious, then?"

"I grant you that a girl like Claire de Cernay is charming; there is a graceful languor about her most attractive. But I know one," he murmured, "whose beauty far surpasses hers. Have not poets always spoken with contempt of fair-haired beauties?"

There was both malice and sparkle in the eye of the dark beauty before him.

"Tell me then your opinion of the others. What can you say of them?"

"Ah, theirs is the beauty of the dusk, the beauty of a dark night in which shine twin bright stars—your eyes, Mignonne. Do you frown? 'Tis the splendor of a stormy day, full of peril and tempest. Do you smile? Ah, 'tis the soft calm of night, the serene peace that envelops the heart and makes it dream, sing, hope . . . love."

"Very pretty—put that in verse and it would not make a bad sonnet."

"Do not laugh. I am serious. It is no longer the poet who speaks in terms of rhythm, rhyme, and verse, but a beating heart, whose entire vocabulary is confined to one word—love."

"Take care, Monsieur de Bergerac. If I were foolish, I might find a hidden meaning in your words."

The poet, seizing her hand, said with emotion:

"And if I should tell you their meaning, should tell you of my love, what would be your reply?"

The pretty actress blushed and hesitated. Then, with a quick movement, withdrew her hand, and, smiling maliciously, said:

"I should reply that your friend is waiting impatiently for a letter, and that it's not very considerate to keep him thus waiting."

"But sleep makes him patient!"

"Let us not abuse that patience."

Before he could stop her, she approached the Cavalier and bending down said:

"Wake up, Prince Charming! Here's something better than your dreams."

"What is it?" asked Tancrède, rousing himself.

"It is I, Cavalier, your messenger."

"By my star!" exclaimed the young man. "I was dreaming of fair daylight and here comes dark night to visit me."

"Didn't you expect me?"

The young man sat bolt upright.

"Expect you! I had waited so long that I could wait no longer, and slept. Have you seen her?"

"Yes."

"How did she receive my letter? What did she say?

Was she angry at my boldness? Did she smile? Take pity on me and speak."

"What a string of questions! Yes, she took your letter, and read it."

"What did she say?"

"Nothing."

"What! Not a word?"

"Not a syllable."

"Oh, it can't be true!"

"Don't be too alarmed! Even if she said nothing, she found a way of letting you know her feelings."

"What?"

"She wrote you."

"A letter! A letter from Claire! Oh, give it to me, quickly!"

"Gently—don't claw me!"

The young man seized the paper about which she had been teasing him, and began to read it eagerly, oblivious of the messenger and of the poet.

"My word!" said the girl, "I believe that in his haste he has scratched me."

"Didn't I tell you," remarked Cyrano, "to let sleeping dogs lie?"

Mademoiselle Minou watched the Cavalier out of the corner of her eye. His face was completely transfigured, shining with supreme happiness.

"Cyrano!" he cried after finishing the letter. "Oh, Cyrano, my good friend, what happiness!"

He handed him Claire's letter.

"Read it! It overcomes me."

The poet read with a calm air that was in strong contrast to the exuberance of his young friend. The actress watched him closely. He read slowly, frowned, and then returned the letter to the Cavalier.

"Well," panted the young man, dashed by this cool reception, "is that all you have to say?"

"Yes!" answered Cyrano calmly.

"It's impossible! You've not read it. A meeting, Cyrano! Claire offers to meet me."

"So I see."

"She will not let me leave without a last word of farewell and consolation. I never dared dream of such good fortune."

"Ah!"

"Read, Cyrano, read! Tomorrow at daybreak, outside the Faubourg Saint-Martin, near the Convent of the Récollets, at a small house, quiet and by itself, she will be there, alone—to give me a last farewell!"

Mademoiselle Minou followed this scene with unflagging interest. Cyrano preserved his impenetrable calm.

"Don't you fear this will delay us?" he said at last.

"Not more than a few minutes. Claire has thought of everything. Read it again. The place is on our road—the one by which we leave tomorrow. There's no reason why I shouldn't stop there for a few moments. Then I will join you at the place agreed upon."

The Gascon, still suspicious, shook his head.

"*Morbleu!*" exclaimed the Cavalier. "What's wrong now? Speak, please."

"Do you really wish me to speak?"

"Yes."

"Frankly?"

"Of course!"

"Well, then, don't keep that rendez-vous. Don't go."

Tancrède sprang up, beside himself with emotion.

"Not go . . . when she, Claire, is waiting for me? What would she think? Are you now suspicious of her?"

"Of her? No!"

"Of whom, then?"

There was an embarrassed silence. The young man panted with excitement. Cyrano remained silent, his head bowed deep in thought. As for Mademoiselle Minou, she awaited the outcome with the keenest interest, a faint smile on her lips.

Finally the poet raised his head and said slowly:

"I suspect no one. I fear no trap. Yet this meeting would be extremely dangerous—the secret might leak out."

"Who would give it away?"

"How should I know?"

"Well, really," intervened Mademoiselle Minou in a tone of outraged innocence, "this is too much. These suspicions insult me!"

"You?" asked the poet, ill at ease.

"Was it not for you that I undertook this delicate mis-

sion? How could the secret escape except through me?"

Cyrano, altogether upset by this sudden attack, made no reply. She continued, even more passionately.

"You have strange ways, Monsieur de Bergerac, of showing gratitude. I might have expected this!"

She moved toward the door with an air of insulted dignity. The Gascon rushed after her to hold her back.

"She's right!" exclaimed Tancrède. "You've become so suspicious, you, who are the best of men, that you will end by making yourself odious."

The actress continued the attack:

"Just suppose it were Monsieur de Bergerac who had this rendez-vous! He would have more reasons for going than he now has arguments to dissuade you."

"Yes, by my star, that's it! Cyrano is jealous. He hates to see another successful in love."

The poor poet, overwhelmed by this onslaught, looked first at the laughing Cavalier and then at the pouting actress.

"*Sandious!*" he finally said. "You must be right. But, if I am jealous," he said, leaning toward the girl, "you are the cause—and, you can be the remedy."

"Thank heaven," said Tancrède. "We're now all friends again. Our gloomy friend admits he's in the wrong."

"Does he?" said the actress slyly.

"Yes, he does!"

"And now," remarked the Cavalier, "we can spend our

last hours of freedom in the service of the god who demands our sacrifices—the god of love."

"The god of love!" sighed the poet, vanquished but not convinced.

"Well, that's agreed! At daybreak I'll go to the Convent of the Récollets!" exclaimed Tancrède, triumphantly.

"You are right, my boy," said Cyrano in a voice of sudden decision. "But to be on the safe side, we'll go together."

A strange smile appeared on the face of the actress, but it vanished so quickly that the poet did not notice it.

"After all," he added with an air of decision, "this will not change our plans. Only, instead of leaving at daybreak, I'll be off an hour or two before. I'll meet you at the Convent of the Récollets, rather than at Luzarches."

The Cavalier was about to object, but Mademoiselle Minou interrupted him:

"A perfect plan!" she exclaimed approvingly.

The Gascon now began to expand, and to make up for his previous gloominess. He felt that he had reconciled a boldness to prudence, assurance to the uncertainties of love. The actress still smiled her enigmatic smile.

Cyrano, opening a bottle of Touraine wine, filled three glasses and passed them around.

"Mademoiselle Minou, will you propose the toast?"

"To the Cavalier's success in love!" she said.

"And to no other love, my dear?"

"Whose?" she asked archly.

"Mine!" replied the poet, boldly.

Mademoiselle Minou continued with the flash of her smile to keep the poet's heart captive, and yet to prevent further action on his part. She stepped quickly back from Cyrano and called for the toast. They drained the glasses. Then suddenly she said:

"My friends, it is late, I must leave you. What would honest Master Coquillart think if he knew I were here? Farewell!"

With a last ravishing glance at the poor poet, she tripped to the door and was gone before Cyrano who tried eagerly to hold her could say a word. And in another moment they heard the sharp closing of her door. For some time the two comrades remained silent. The Cavalier read over and over again Claire's letter, while the Gascon sat at the table, partaking freely of the wine. Tancrède seemed finally to have memorized the precious letter. Then, after several long yawns, he decided that it was time to sleep. Again folding his coat with great care, he made an improvised bed.

"Good night, Cyrano. Until tomorrow morning!" murmured Tancrède almost asleep.

The Gascon, deeply engrossed in his own thoughts, did not answer. Until late in the night, he remained at the table, dreaming and thinking as he drank. At one time he reached for paper, and began to write feverishly. But

the result did not please him, and he tore it up. Finally the brave Gascon also felt the need of sleep, and, after a rueful glance at the empty cot, stretched himself out on the floor beside the sleeping Cavalier.

CHAPTER XX

THE AMBUSH

THE Cavalier awoke at dawn. The thought of his meeting with Claire came to him at once, and he hastened to arise. Beside him, overcome by the fatigues of an arduous day, Cyrano slept deeply.

Tancrède hesitated, his arm poised over the Gascon's shoulder, not knowing whether to awaken the sleeper or not.

"After all," thought the young soldier, "why should I disturb him? If I leave now without him, it will give me more time for the meeting. Cyrano will soon overtake me. In broad daylight his shadowy fears of last night seem absurd!"

Having come to this decision, he dressed quickly, but with so little noise that the poet's regular breathing continued uninterrupted. Against the chill of the morning, the young man took a last draught of the Maraschino. As he left *The White Sheep*, he all but ran into a stable-boy holding a horse saddled and bridled. The animal suddenly began to neigh and to show signs of excitement.

"Capitan!" cried the Cavalier, rushing toward the noble steed as if greeting a long-lost friend.

After inspecting the horse carefully to make sure that everything was ready for an arduous journey, he jumped into the saddle. A last look up and down the street showed not a soul in sight except the groom. He took a crown from his purse and threw it to the man.

"There you are, my good fellow!" he cried. "Drink to my health!"

"Farewell, monsieur, and good luck!" answered the groom, hastily picking up the coin.

The Cavalier touched the horse's flanks with his spurs, and *Capitan,* eagerly responding, started off into the morning mist at a smart trot. The air was cool and invigorating, and he had reached the Saint-Martin gate when the first rays of the rising sun greeted him. The journey had begun under the most auspicious circumstances. The young man gave himself up to a thousand pleasant thoughts, most of them concerning Claire—Claire whom he was to see so soon!

Indeed, Tancrède had never before felt so much affection for the young girl. Her granting him this last meeting was an action of supreme kindness which deeply touched the young man. While he had believed himself to be on the road to fortune, the lovely girl had always maintained a prudent reserve. She had avoided any situation and carefully refrained from any word that might appear compromising. But now the generous girl suddenly granted

him a favor which she would have refused before—now that his hopes for the future had vanished and he was plunged back into the abyss of mystery and shame. She had granted him nothing when he was about to realize his high fortunes. Yet now that he was a poor soldier whose only possessions were his sword and his love for her, she showed an exquisite kindness.

The young lover was engrossed with such thoughts when he discovered that he had passed the square of Saint-Laurent, and was outside the city. Claire's letter, which he knew by heart, had instructed him to go to a fountain, not far from the walls of the Convent of the Récollets. It was at this point that the road forked, one road going on to La Chapelle, and the other to Aubervilliers-les-Vertus. There an old woman, a faithful servant of the Duchess of Chevreuse, would be waiting for him. She would lead him to the place agreed upon—a little deserted house which the Duchess had often used in her political intrigues.

As he approached the spot, the Cavalier slowed *Capitan* down to a walk, while he examined his surroundings. On his right was a high, gloomy wall, behind which arose tree-tops, and the slender spire of a little chapel. The wall was pierced in one place only by a massive, heavily bolted door. A cross on the door showed this to be the entrance to the Convent of the Récollets. One branch of the road continued past the wall through low, marshy country. To the left, the other road led to a little group of houses and

stables that apparently belonged to the poor farmers who cultivated the neighboring fields. At the intersection of the two roads was a little fountain whose water dripped feebly into its basin.

Just as the Cavalier approached this spot, a shabby old woman hobbled out of the little side street. She carried a pail, and made her way to the fountain.

"She must be my guide," thought Tancrède, looking somewhat ruefully at this grim figure the fates had placed at the door of his paradise.

He drew nearer and stopped his horse:

"One moment, my good woman," he called, "will you give my horse a drink from your pail?"

The old woman raised her head and looked fixedly at the Cavalier, while she held the pail for *Capitan*. After the horse had drunk his fill, she remained there motionless, moving her lips as if to speak. Not a sound came from her lips. The young man, embarrassed by her silent scrutiny, began to pat the horse's neck. The old woman seized his hand, and examined the ring on his finger. Then, without another word, she made a sign for him to follow her.

"The devil!" muttered Tancrède. "She's as voiceless as my old friend Monsieur Bernard!"

The old woman, still carrying the pail and hobbling slowly along, entered the little road from which she had appeared. The Cavalier followed on *Capitan*. The road, passing between the wall of the monastery and a hedge of

evergreens, was extremely narrow. Tancrède's coat kept catching on the bushes, while *Capitan*, advancing very gingerly, occasionally slipped on the stones. After about a hundred feet, the road came to an abrupt end. But the old woman opened an ancient gate, and motioned to the young man to follow. They entered a little open space formed by a projection of the wall at the corner.

It seemed impossible to advance further; the Cavalier looked questioningly at his guide. She answered by holding back the branches of a clump of bushes, thus enabling him to see a tiny path that wound between the wall and a tall hedge.

"Very good!" murmured Tancrède. "It's a strange passage and a stranger guide, but, after all—think of what's in store for me!"

As it was impossible to take his horse further, he dismounted, and tied *Capitan* to a ring in the wall. The noble horse did not appear to approve of the proceedings, and neighed piteously.

"Courage, old fellow," said the Cavalier soothingly, patting his horse with an affectionate hand. "I know, you'd rather be on the highway. But don't worry, I'll be with you in a few minutes. You'll have plenty of work to do before night."

The old woman waited for him, showing signs of great impatience. The Cavalier passed through the bushes, whose branches closed again behind them.

"The devil himself couldn't follow us here," he thought.

Suddenly another idea entered his head.

"By my star! What about Cyrano?"

He stopped short, considering this new complication.

"Even if my friend has become a magician, he'll never find me here. One minute, my good woman," he said in a loud voice. "If a man with a large nose and mounted on a chestnut horse comes after me, tell him where I am."

The hag shook her head and stopped open-mouthed, with the air of one not understanding. Tancrède hastened to explain:

"He's a close friend of mine, who is to meet me here."

She shrugged her shoulders, and, pointing with a finger to her ear, continued along the path.

"Deaf!" exclaimed Tancrède, following her. "What luck! Oh, well, Cyrano will wait for me at the fountain."

He now walked on in silence, not thinking it profitable to attempt further conversation with one who was deaf and, for all he knew, dumb also. At last they came in sight of a house of which perhaps three-quarters was in ruins. There was, however, a certain dignity in its ivy-covered stone walls, surrounded by a lovely old park. The ruins were overgrown with bushes and shrubs, and the walls were broken in many places. There was just one wing of the house which retained any semblance of preservation. It had remained intact as far as the first floor to which a crumbling stair-case in front led.

Still following the old woman, the Cavalier passed the

bushes that grew in the enclosure, and climbed the stairs. His guide pushed open a door, and they found themselves in a large room, ruined and deserted like the rest of the building. The only furniture was an old bench, a decrepit table, and a broken stool. Yet the room had a certain dignity of appearance which bore witness to its former splendor—the massive fireplace, for instance, and the mullioned window which opened on the overgrown garden.

The old woman by a sign indicated that he was to wait there. Then darting a last look at him, with a horrible smile that displayed her toothless gums, like a sorceress, she disappeared without the least noise. Tancrède threw his hat on the bench, placed his sword across the stool, and sat down on a corner of the table. He carefully rearranged his dishevelled locks, after which, to pass the time away, he walked to the window and looked out over the garden.

On every side, except the one by which he had entered, the park was enclosed by high walls. For a moment it occurred to him that he must be behind the Convent of the Récollets, and he even thought he heard the confused noise of vehicles and horses on the highway. But he quickly dismissed this idea. If there had been a direct entrance, why should he have been brought here by such a tortuous route?

The wall at the end of the garden disappeared in the thick undergrowth. His attention was attracted by a doorway in the wall that appeared to have been recently built in. The door did not have the same air of antiquity and

decay as the rest of the structure, and its newness was out of keeping with the solitude and desolation of the place.

But the young man had no time to continue these reflections. He suddenly heard the rumbling noise of an approaching carriage. There could be no doubt of it. There was also the sound of horses' hoofs. He turned his eyes in this direction, and was surprised to see a little door in the wall which he had not noticed before, open. It was now clear that the house lay back of the convent, along the highway. Why then?—but there was no time to think. A woman entered the garden, and the breathless Tancrède was completely engrossed in watching her.

The door closed behind her. Alone, dressed in a long hooded mantle, she advanced toward the house, pushing her way through the bushes, jumping lightly over broken branches. The Cavalier would have recognized that graceful figure among a thousand.

"Claire!" he cried.

The lovely girl looked up and saw him. With a pretty gesture she let fall her hood, and he could see her beautiful face light up with a tender smile. The young soldier's heart was beating furiously, and he leaned far out the window, calling to her across the silence with all the force of his love.

She approached rapidly. Each step she took was a confession of her love. The distance along the wall seemed interminable, and in her haste she began to run. Her silk scarf floated behind her like wings spread for flight. For

a moment she was hidden behind a bush, and then again came in full view, almost at the end of the path leading to the house.

Then something happened! The Cavalier felt suddenly faint, and his head swam giddily. An inarticulate cry arose in his throat and was stifled.

There . . . behind the young girl . . . the door newly built into the wall had opened! She advanced, unconscious of danger, a smile on her lips. She was almost at the house.

Pale and frozen with fear, his forehead covered with agonized sweat, he beheld sinister faces appearing through the wall. He saw the menacing flash of swords. Rooted to the spot, he could not utter a sound, a mute witness of a horrible nightmare.

These men rushed up to Claire, surrounded her, seized her, lifted her from the ground. A scream—a cry of mortal terror and of supreme appeal—died on her lips, choked back by a brutal gag.

This all happened in a second. The Cavalier, by a violent effort, recovered his senses. A savage cry, like the roar of a wounded animal, arose from his throat, and he rushed across the room to the stairs. The door was suddenly thrown open. Men appeared in the door-way, with drawn swords, cutting off his escape.

Tancrède, caged, turned around, and bounded across the room, upsetting table, bench, and stool. Then, taking advantage of the moment he had thus gained, he leaped from

the window. The soft earth broke the shock of the fall. Quickly he picked himself up. His pursuers, shouting and cursing violently, rushed down the stairway in their effort to overtake him.

He paid no attention to them, and sped forward. Despite the quickness of his movements the men who had seized Claire were far ahead of him, carrying the struggling girl in their arms. The young man saw them about to disappear through the breach in the wall.

"Cowards! You cowards!" he cried after them. "Turn and let me see your dastardly faces."

A useless challenge, a vain appeal. The retreating bravoes had reached the wall and one by one were disappearing through the opening.

"Claire, Claire!" he called, gasping for breath. "I'm coming, Claire!"

The poor girl crushed and exhausted, heard him. As the man who held her attempted to pass through the door, she reached out her hands, clinging desperately to the wall. The bully hurled a vile oath at her as he forced her to break her grip.

"Help!" It was Claire's last feeble call, quickly stifled by the man's brutal hand.

The Cavalier now raced forward with superhuman energy. On, on he flew, rushing past fallen trees, bushes, thickets.

The ruffian looked around, terrified. Only a few steps separated him from this whirlwind. He made a

great effort to escape, and to put between him and his pursuer the insuperable barrier of the heavy door, which stood open a few feet ahead of him.

But it was too late! With a final bound, like the spring of a wounded panther, the Cavalier leaped upon the man, and his fingers closed around his throat. The bravo was held in a vice-like grip, his eyes transfixed with horror, and a hollow rattle came from his throat. He had just strength enough to gasp:

"Strike! Strike!"

What had happened?

The Cavalier, aghast, felt his hands relax and saw the man escape. His opponent carried off the fainting girl in his arms, looking around with a diabolical laugh.

A cold sweat covered Tancrède's body. His paralyzed limbs refused to move. His mind became confused. A sinister darkness engulfed him. His knees gave way, and he fell to the ground upon his face in a pool of blood.

His pursuers, though outdistanced, had followed hard after him. The few seconds lost in this conflict had enabled them to overtake him at the very moment he was about to throttle his enemy and rescue Claire. At the signal from their leader, whom Tancrède had half strangled, ten swords reached the Cavalier's body.

This all happened with such violence and rapidity that Tancrède had no time to think or to feel. He had fallen to the ground, struck down like a slaughtered beast.

CHAPTER XXI

PANDORA'S BOX

It was almost dusk. When the Cavalier regained consciousness, he found himself in bed, in a little room with white walls, barren, and cold, like a monk's cell. The last rays of a setting sun came in through the barred window.

He looked around with haggard eyes. He seemed to have awakened from a deep sleep, broken by many nightmares. Where was he? What had happened? What was this devouring heat that racked his body? Slowly memory returned. One word came to his lips: *Claire!* All became clear. In a flash he saw everything—the ambush, the abduction, the mad chase. . . .

And then there was a blank. Where was Claire? Why was he here, in a strange bed? What was this throbbing pain he felt? He tried to sit up, but a thousand sharp needle-pricks made him cry out. He fell back on the bed.

"Well, well, our fierce young lion cub awakens," said a harsh voice near him.

Another voice, calm and authoritative, replied:

"*A priori,* my diagnosis was correct, *hic et nunc!* No, it's not a mortal case at all. A coma following a hemorrhage . . . *Post hoc, ergo propter hoc!*"

A good-natured face leaned over the patient, and felt him carefully all over. Then he coughed, and announced learnedly:

"Here's a man who has played in luck. Every blow landed either in his limbs or in the shoulder. Not a single vital organ has been touched. *Quod erat demonstrandum.* I must take one more look."

With an expert hand, the surgeon bared the shoulder and examined a wound. The Cavalier bit his lips to keep back a cry of pain.

"*Victis honos!* I hold myself responsible for his life. He bears everything *æquo animo!*"

"*Optime!*" came from a third voice in the shadow, a soft, caressing voice.

The Cavalier, surprised, half opened his eyes which he had kept closed during the surgeon's examination. He saw a handsome gentleman, with dark complexion, soft eyes, smiling face, who advanced toward his bed in a most affable manner.

"So this is our young rebel," continued the pleasant voice. "It's too bad he's scratched a bit. But all's well that mends well."

He turned to the surgeon:

"Is he in any condition to be questioned?"

"Certainly, Monseigneur, he can speak *motu proprio,*"

answered the man of science. "But it might be wiser to wait a bit. His fever is still high."

"That's quite enough," replied Mazarin impatiently. "One must always strike while the iron is hot."

The Monseigneur motioned an assistant to approach.

"Have candles brought in, Ruvigny, and then clear every one out of the room."

The Cavalier, his head burning and his body aching painfully, watched this scene in a completely detached way. Figures moved here and there swiftly as if in a dream, only indistinctly visible to his fever-stricken eyes. This sensation of unreality was increased when the room suddenly became quiet, lighted only by the candles which cast a soft glow over the little cell. The poor soldier felt that something of tremendous importance was about to happen, but he could not overcome the lethargy into which he had sunk.

He saw the strange gentleman glide up to his bedside, pull up a chair near him, and sit down. Without a word, the stranger looked intently at him for a long time as though he were casting a spell over him. The Cavalier, weakened by loss of blood and racked by fever, had no strength to resist him. His own eyes opened wide and, fascinated, he watched every movement of his visitor. He saw him search for something beneath his cloak, draw forth mysteriously some object, and then place it carefully on the bed.

Slowly, slowly, Tancrède, as if hypnotized, raised him-

self from his bed of pain, a look of stupor on his face, his haggard eyes staring in fascination. This thing, this mysterious object was *his casket!* His casket that had been stolen, disappeared, vanished at Barbette's! The precious casket which contained all his hopes for the future! He saw it there before him—he had regained it at last! Oh, heavens, he had merely to stretch forth his hand and he would once more have his casket!

Tancrède suppressed the cry that trembled on his lips: "My casket!" The unknown gentleman smiled, his eyes shining triumphantly. An almost unconscious instinct had warned the Cavalier to be silent. How could this strange man, sprung from the shadows, perhaps a figment of his own fevered imagination, have obtained his precious talisman? The young soldier made a tremendous effort to collect his scattered wits and to regain his lost strength.

"Very good, young man," murmured the stranger softly. "You recognize this, I think?"

The speaker pointed to the little box, looking searchingly all the time at the wounded youth. Tancrède closed his eyes. He felt that a yawning abyss lay before him, but that he could not keep himself from falling into it.

"Answer," breathed the voice caressingly.

But a voice within the Cavalier murmured:

"Do not answer!"

It seemed as if some far-away voice were speaking. He thought he saw the beautiful, majestic face of the Queen before him. She looked beseechingly, tears in her eyes.

The vision faded, then vanished. The Cavalier opened his eyes. The stranger was leaning over him, waiting for him to speak.

"Well, do you recognize that casket?"

Tancrède shook his head and answered feebly:

"No!"

A pale smile flickered on the lips of the other.

"How very strange!" he whispered. "This casket was found in your room at Barbette's. You admit that you were there?"

"I do remember having passed a night there."

"And a precious possession disappeared mysteriously?"

The young man did not reply. Mazarin's feverish impatience to clutch his prey became obvious to his prisoner, and the hypnotic charm was broken for the moment.

Restraining his impatience, the Italian replied, with a slight grimace:

"Very well, you do not recognize it. I'm very sorry—for you, at least—for it contains . . . perhaps you do not know its contents?"

His curiosity was too strong and the Cavalier, in spite of himself, looked up at the speaker. Mazarin noticed this interest, and continued:

"I'll tell you, and then your memory may became clearer. This slight, innocent-looking little box contains—a fortune!"

The Cavalier trembled with excitement.

"Yes, its possessor will come into a great fortune. A

princely fortune, enough to fill with envy the richest and most noble gentleman in the Kingdom."

The poor invalid was deeply moved.

"Now, let us suppose," continūed his tempter, "just as a hypothesis, that this casket belonged to you. Young man, you could never thank God enough for your marvellous fortune. You go to bed a poor soldier of fortune compromised by dangerous intrigues, and your life a forfeit to the State. But you will wake up, rich, powerful."

Mazarin pronounced the next words slowly:

"You will be as pure as snow, innocent of intrigues against the State. You can hold your head high in the face of the entire world. Who knows, perhaps you will obtain revenge on those scoundrels who have made your life so miserable."

The Italian laid his finger on Tancrède's breast.

"They must indeed be villains who were capable of such a cowardly ambush. What do you say? Would you like to gain a complete revenge?"

Mazarin had chosen his words carefully, and each one of them struck home. The glorious future that he had outlined fascinated the poor soldier, who struggled to resist this overwhelming temptation. His hands clutched the sheets convulsively; he could not take his eyes from the casket. The sly Italian opened the box as if to show the young man the fortune that was his. Carelessly he fingered the mysterious contents.

"Come, now, think a little more carefully," he said

insinuatingly. "The loss of blood has disturbed your memory. My dear boy, you recognize this casket, don't you?"

Tancrède stared feverishly at the casket which contained all his hopes. His body was convulsed by a sudden spasm.

"No!" he gasped. "I do not recognize it!"

The Queen had ordered him to remain silent. One rash word might mean the destruction of innocent persons. This diabolical tempter must have sprung from the depths of hell. His insinuating insistence showed only too well the present danger.

The young man, too weakened to continue the struggle, looked at his torturer as if to implore mercy. He realized that his only hope in this unequal combat was to remain silent.

Mazarin closed the lid of the casket. The quiet sound pierced the invalid's heart. Again the tomb closed over his dead hopes.

"It's too bad, quite too bad—a regrettable loss of memory," murmured the Italian, nonchalantly. "It leaves a certain young man in a most disagreeable position . . . but a certain young lady is even more compromised."

A sudden look of alarm appeared on Tancrède's face. Mazarin pretended not to notice it, but continued, as if talking to himself:

"How will that poor little Claire de Cernay get out of this?"

The Cavalier sat bolt upright.

"For, after all, she is hopelessly compromised. How can Her Majesty's attendant explain her presence here? Even the Queen may be involved."

Tancrède listened, panting. Mazarin turned to him.

"Oh, if only you were . . ."

He stopped, as if hesitating to pronounce an illustrious name. Then, apparently changing his mind, he said:

"If only you were . . . the owner of the casket, all could be so easily arranged."

The young man's eyes sparkled with new hope.

"If she had arranged a meeting with the noble person who is the owner of this casket, ah . . . ! Everything would be changed! Even Cardinal Richelieu, the severest of all critics, would smile indulgently—a young nobleman and a Maid of Honor love each other, and have this romantic meeting. Splendid! A marriage could be easily arranged if the young persons desired it."

A sigh escaped the Cavalier's lips. This picture of unhoped for happiness overwhelmed him. He, the husband of Claire—with Richelieu's approval! Oh, heaven, it was too much! It took all his power of will to restrain a cry of joy. His secret trembled on his lips.

"The Queen!" he murmured to himself. "I must think of nothing but the Queen!"

Mazarin, waiting for his words to sink in, continued, in a severe tone:

"But you are not the person I thought. You do not recognize the casket. You, a poor soldier of fortune,

dared to raise your eyes to a girl of high family! Why, you're only an adventurer!"

This outburst made the Cavalier cringe.

"The imprudent young woman forgot her duty to herself and to the Queen, her mistress, and allowed herself to be compromised. She had a secret meeting with this adventurer! Nothing can expiate such a fault. Her Majesty is just and will be the first to admit this."

"What will become of her then?" asked Tancrède anxiously.

"The convent—and the veil—will be her destiny, discipline for the rest of her life."

The young soldier fell back crushed. His heart was broken. He had destroyed Claire! This man had spoken the truth—she had hopelessly compromised herself with a poor adventurer.

"Come," said the Italian, sweetly, "a little good will is all you need. It's not your death, but your safety that we desire. How can you hesitate between these alternatives? On the one hand, a great fortune and a happy marriage; on the other, shame—and prison!"

A final struggle was taking place within the Cavalier's breast. He no longer heard Mazarin. He thought of Claire, of her alone. The Convent and the veil for the rest of her life. What perpetual tears of shame! She, so eager, so gracious, so full of energy, condemned to a life without hope. No! No! It could not be!

"Well, young man, do you finally recognize it—this little casket?" murmured Mazarin.

Tancrède's mind was made up, and he stretched forth his hand. But the voice again cried out from the very depths of his soul:

"Be careful! You are betraying your trust! This man lies, he tempts you, he wishes to seize you and use you as a tool."

He closed his eyes, faint and dizzy. First he saw Claire's lovely face, and then the veiled figure of a mysterious person—that mother whom he did not know, and whom he might ruin with one word. And then the figure of his mother blended into the noble, sad figure of Anne of Austria, his Queen! His eyes filled with tears and he was moved to the depths of his heart.

His outstretched hand pushed back violently the casket which Mazarin offered him. Summoning all the strength left in his loyal body, the Cavalier cried:

"No! I do not recognize it! No, it is not mine!"

He sank back on the bed, panting. Mazarin arose, pale, trembling with anger. He leaned toward the brave young soldier, who proudly returned his angry glance. The Italian now spoke in a voice from which all the sweetness was gone.

"Hear me," he snarled. "There is only a minute left. You realize perfectly well that I need you. I have searched far and wide for you. It is my hand that you have felt

reaching for you from out the shadow. For a long time you have escaped me. At last I have you—and some one else whom you hold dearer than your life."

Tancrède, tossing feverishly on his bed of pain, kept his lips firmly shut. His tormenter, anxious to inflict further torture, continued:

"You now know who I am. You know what I want and what I can do! Friends or enemies, choose!"

A scornful smile appeared on the invalid's pale lips.

"Think carefully, young man! Enemies! Reflect what that means. You are a follower of Madame de Chevreuse, an emissary of the Princes, the Queen's secret messenger! For a month I have been on your trail—at Barbette's, at the Convent of the Carmelites, on the Midi highway, in Sedan . . ."

He came nearer, to whisper in a low voice:

"And finally at the Louvre, in the Queen's chambers. You would never have escaped from my men there except for the insane audacity of that cursed friend of yours . . ."

Tancrède began to see more clearly now. He remembered certain coughs of Cyrano's. A gradual peace came to his troubled mind. The more the Italian gave way to his anger and hatred, the more he felt relieved that he had resisted the man's seductive offer.

The enraged Mazarin was now speaking in short phrases:

"Conspirator . . . enemy of the State . . . guilty of high treason! You will face prison . . . the scaffold!"

The young man still smiled defiantly.

"And for your accomplice, for that stupid Claire de Cernay, no pity! Disgrace . . . tears . . . agony—slow agony in confinement, in isolation, in pain!"

At this moment there was a noise without. Footsteps of armed men could be heard approaching down a corridor.

Mazarin quickly hid the casket beneath his cloak.

"He, already!" he murmured. Then, leaning over the Cavalier, panting, fixing him with a fiery look, he hissed:

"Choose, there is no time left! One word, one sign, I shall understand. This casket . . ."

A key turned in a lock.

"Is yours?"

"No!" cried the Cavalier. "No, no, no!"

The Italian's face underwent another transformation. He had resumed his smiling, gracious manner. He bowed low before the man who entered, escorted by the guards.

"Monseigneur," he said, "I promised to deliver to you the key to the Princes' conspiracy. I have kept my promise. Behold the messenger of the Duchess!"

Tancrède saw a tall man approach his bed, lean over, and examine him with a penetrating glance.

"Very good, Monsieur de Mazarin," pronounced Richelieu's deep voice. "Once more you have saved the State."

Again Tancrède felt himself lost in a mist. Everything became blurred. The Cavalier fainted.

LATE that night Monsieur du Tremblay, governor of the Bastille, was awakened by an assistant. A messenger from His Majesty had arrived with two warrants of imprisonment. The governor of the prison read them quickly:

Monsieur du Tremblay will receive and guard in the Bastille the Cavalier Tancrède, charged with high treason. Such is our will. *Louis.*

In the margin was written in Richelieu's hand:

Keep the prisoner in the strictest secrecy. No one must suspect his presence.

"Very good," muttered Monsieur du Tremblay.

The second warrant read the same as the first, with the exception of the name:

Jean-Baptiste L'Hermite, Sieur de Vauselle.

It also bore a message in the margin, which du Tremblay read with surprise:

Monsieur du Tremblay will obey the instructions of the Sieur de Vauselle, who is our agent, and will aid him in what he will do for the safety of the State.

Monsieur du Tremblay's surprise was not of long duration. He was himself, the brother of the famous Capuchin, Father Joseph, confidant of Richelieu, and later well known as the *Grey Cardinal*, a past master of political intrigue. Monsieur du Tremblay was not astonished therefore at such commands.

He hastened to receive the two personages entrusted to him, and then returned quietly to his bed-chamber. A word with the Sieur de Vauselle had made all clear. The worthy governor smiled as he climbed into bed—proof that he had understood.

END OF
Martyr to the Queen

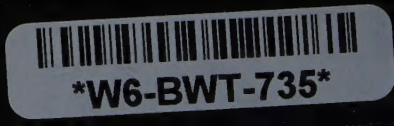
CONTINUED IN "THE SECRET OF THE BASTILLE"

Martyr to the Queen

Feval and Lassez

FEV
FICTION

FEV
FICTION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